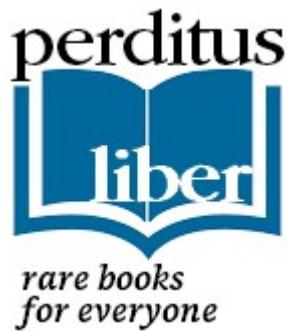


HERE COMES THE LADY



M P SHIEL



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Here Comes The Lady

by

M. P. Shiel

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HERE COMES THE LADY

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By
M. P. SHIEL

Author of
“How the Old Woman Got Home”,
“Children of the Wind”,
etc.



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“My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:
This only is the witchcraft I have used;
Here comes the lady, let her witness it.”

Shakespeare

CHAPTER I

THE gods greatly loved Joy Richards, and gave her good and bad: deprived her of sight, but gave her insight, health, and grace, and great estate, and songs in her night.

At the age of twelve, about the time when an accident cost her her sight, she became a millionairess; and in her fifteenth year, when both her parents died, a millionairess four times over. (Her people were much associated with the business of brewing, and, some of them, with that hematite ore of which Bessemer steel is made.)

From that year she began to be pursued by suitors, and each year they multiplied, she was such a pretty thing, with her globe of gold hair at her nape, her gracious bulge of hip and breast, and her big eyes that did not seem blind, but, on the contrary, seemed to see a vision; and it was obvious enough that that low breadth of forehead, with its level brows, had lots of bone and brains about it. But at eighteen, though she had long felt a drawing toward marriage, she was still a maid: for, being unable to see those who wooed her, she knew not which one of them to choose for her mate—or so she said.

Meantime, Joy managed to live far from unhappily on that manna of emotions her heart was fed with, on her music, her dancing—she could dance charmingly—

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her daily gymnastics, and the tales that were told her: for she had a lust of the ear for hearing of strange events, and when anyone began to narrate, she would wriggle herself cosily a little in her sofa-corner, as who should say “Now, I think, I am all right!”

When real tales failed her she would even hear the reading of tales from magazines, etc.; but a lack of motive in these, even an ignorance of the science of art, a smack of the market, a staleness and dead level, as though they had all been written by twins who were always in one mood, left her feeling as though she had eaten tinned fruit: which fruit is a sort of poison. However, she managed on the whole to dodge a dull moment. This young lady had no fewer than three lady’s-maids, who had been picked out of the multitude of lady’s-maids on account of their tongues, their addictedness to

expatiating on things which have taken place: and they had not failed to “strike oil” at Castle Lanchester, where Joy liked to reside.

This Castle Lanchester is a fortress engarrisoned among the crags of the Normandy coast north of Fécamp; and there is a stair there which, cut out of the cliff-wall, leads down to the beach of a harbour small and cosy, enclosed betwixt two claws of cliff all timbered: which stair is darkish beneath an arbour of leafage; and half-way down it (at the end of a rock-tunnel at right-angles to it), there’s a place among the crags—arbour, rockery, grotto—where a waterbrook crawls through boscage as fresh and gay as that emerald of a tigress’s eye; and there are seats within it, a square well, with books, cushions,

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instruments of music: for no shower can invade its fernery, it is so embowered and brown with shades, and bumblebees hum about it through summer days, and hundreds of birds spurt and chirp there to that murmuring which the surge makes. This was perhaps the spot of Joy’s choice for sitting and listening, or fingering her harp of an afternoon, and seeing the sea with her sightless eyes.

But when her eighteenth birthday occurred, went by, and she felt her youth oozing away, she not yet wedded nor working in the way of girls for the world, the matter began to be serious, seeing that she was already three years late to bear a baby with that painlessness which (as the Metchnikoffs say) Nature intends. Moreover, about this time a certain sailor-boy named Tom Bates, a cousin of Joy, wrote to Joy, threatening to come and marry her over the head of everyone, willed she, nilled she: so Joy then said to Lady Anne Sartory, her aunt “Let us have a house-party—the whole dozen, the bunch of them: and each shall tell a tale.”

“Well—and what then?” her Aunt Anne, a stoutish dowager, wished to know.

There was no direct answer, but her aunt remarked a blush, delicate like a reflection of flame glancing upon glass, shoot over the maid’s throat; and she understood that the faculty of relating tales was a faculty highly desirable in whoever was the boy appointed to be the sharer of Joy’s bed and grate, and that the girl was doing well, if her purpose was to select the teller of the best tale. So Lady Anne Sartory set about it: for it was a lovely summer that summer, the sun as it were passing with its planets

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through a happy part of space that year; and, in each letter that she wrote, Joy's Aunt Anne did not fail to subjoin, in a postscript, as by an afterthought, that the addressee had better come ready with his *best* tale—her underlining of “best” could scarcely escape the eye.

So they all flocked to Castle Lanchester, the rash young sailor, Tom Bates, and Hardacre, the Napoleonic “journalist,” and Lord Archibald Stainsbury, who was a sort of clergyman, and the Count of Pichegru-Picard, a mountain of humanity with a sprout of “imperial” on it, and Mr. Stoneley Fragson, the writer, the notorious Socialist, who had no objection to a wealthy wife, herself a Socialist, and Mr. Bernaby Gilbert, the nimble, the “airman,” and the rest of them; and with this dozen of men, who each came with an engagement-ring tucked in some nook of his trunk, came some more men, and a cargo of girls.

And from the fourth afternoon the narratives began in the grotto by the steps down the cliff-side, the order of telling having been determined by lot on the third night. The gang of girls, gathering the significance of what was going on, had roguishly plotted together to pin upon themselves a heart shot by an arrow, or some such symbol—though not a suspicion had Joy of this! She herself never wore jewelry, no brooch, ring, nothing but long coral earrings or “drops,” that made a strange gipsy colour-scheme with her hair and cheeks. She sat in summer muslin by the balcony, the sea away down at her feet playing blue-and-white to the harbour-bar, beyond which, she knew, England was going on, and

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Jupiter's moons, and the story of this solar mystery transacting the myriad romance of its drama; and on the slabs, near her feet, that robust rough frame of the naval fellow Bates, he holding her champagne, she with her shoe-tip wilfully kicking him a little anon, and begging his forgiveness, since she could not see. And after a 'cello solo by a Miss Clode, an American student of the Conservatoire, all bent toward Lord Archibald Stainsbury, a sort of vicar, who, sitting on the well, bowed his large round brow, and began to recount

THE TALE OF HUGH AND AGATHA.

One Saturday afternoon, ladies, the Rev. Hugh Ettrick paced his study, thinking out the morrow's sermon—an exercise accompanied of yore by

dashes of the hand through the hair, though latterly these symptoms of the ardent mind had been less marked in him—a man of twenty-seven, with rather an expanse of forehead, a hanging moustache, a front tooth lacking.

A tapping at the door, and it was good to see how his face lighted up; and now a hand is on him.

Her short-curling hair, like a fleece, made her a boy, till she spoke—and then it was a case of Woman *pur sang*: “A letter!—from Up Hatherley. I’m afraid it may be trouble.”

He read it aloud: and trouble it was, to judge from the puckers and perplexity of his forehead.

“I cannot go,” he said definitely.

She dropped into the armchair at the desk, to

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study the letter with knit brows—from a solicitor, giving Ettrick to understand that one Miss Natalia Ettrick, lying at death’s door, desired to see him; and there was an innuendo that upon his promptness might depend the final form of that will so often redrafted, codiciled, transformed, superseded.

“I cannot go,” Ettrick repeated.

“Hugh, you must.”

He answered irritably: “You know that they have borne as much as they mean to, and I cannot, on my conscience, blame them... continually making excuses for absences—— Oh, I am not blaming myself, but the minister of a chapel like this has no business to be ill. They won’t stand lay preachers——”

“Still, Hugh”——her hand on his shoulders——“if God puts it——”

“The thing that God puts into our way,” he said, “is the duty that lies nearest us.”

“But it is a question”—with wry eyebrows—“*which* duty lies nearest! And there’s John Bucknill—really the favourite nephew *au fond*: if he had not offended her, this chance would never have come. Oh, you will! And I, on my side, undertake—— *Let them grumble, I’ll manage them.*”

Her arms slipped round him: he hesitated; and soon, her battle won, she glanced at the clock, her brows dived into a time-table, came to a decision, and she was away to pack, her ears open to hear the passage of ’bus and tram: for the chapel-door opened upon a main-street, the house making one

building with the chapel, on a patch of ground where three ragged trees seemed to breathe the grievance:

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“Kingsland, London.” And all day long that deplorable droning of horse-trams and their bells’ treble was present in the ear.

“The yellow tram has just passed!” she cried; “take the next green, and you catch the 4.15.”

From the parlour they hurried up four steps to the platform-pulpit, thence down the aisle to the chapel-front; and there she hung a little upon him, her face uplifted—their first little parting!

“You love me? Here it comes! And as to to-morrow—bye-bye!”

With sluggish trot came the Green Incarnation of drowsiness, tinkling; and he, swinging himself in, called: “Try—for to-morrow—!”

She continued to wave...

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By this time, after five years, Merthyr Street Chapel was home to Ettrick, had come to seem the centre of things, as places become to those who strike root and grow with the localness of trees.

At first he had been subjected to the coldest scrutiny, fiercer than the light that beats upon any throne—his voice, his manner, his diet, his fingers, his opinion on smoking, his changes in boots, his views on “sanctification,” every shade of his “doctrine,” the tone of his manhood, had been spoken of in every parlour.

In some months he had got to be received, not with enthusiasm, but with the decision “the right man in the right place:” for he came with some “fire;” moreover, had come unmarried. Pity only that he was not “brilliant,” since one likes a diamond that shines; but, on the whole, here was pure

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metal, and under the parson’s coat a right honest young man. And since those severe eyes of his flock were just, he had first been trusted, then, in a settled way, liked, and, finally, one may say, loved.

Suddenly, however, he had married.

At his native town, with a girl whom nobody knew, a clergyman’s daughter: and there were hopes which that marriage had crushed. About this time it was discovered that his “fire,” his “liberty of utterance,” declined. And they were never unjust—what they observed was really the

first symptoms of nervous failure. Merthyr Street was, in fact, a racking taskmaster, and Ettrick had been trying too hard. When, a year after the marriage, the pulpit got a way of becoming vacant, then the patience of that little flock was tried.

As for Agatha, that same “fierce light” had beat upon her, too—furiously in her case; but again they were as just as judges; and after an impassioned battle for popularity, she had wonderfully won.

Five minutes after Ettrick was gone she was drawing on her gloves in the street, hurrying toward the house of a Mr. Cox, chief Atlas of Merthyr Street: a Kingsland Saturday afternoon, a special thing in Nature, drizzle in the air, streets slippery; over the paving stones some dray would trundle thundering; in some shops gas-jets flared; outside the draper’s a clerk shivering in a frockcoat suggested you in; and jingling trotted yonder that lazy Fate that fainted not. She had to pass down a “market-street,” where the shops vomited upon the pavement, and everyone in Kingsland seemed to be there: “Buy, b-buy!” lipped the butcher-boy;

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“Fish is cheap to-day,” yes, and so were eggs cheap that day; and, coming next into a by-street of houses with brass window-bars, clean steps and curtains, she was hurrying to No. 11 in it, when there was a calling behind her of “Hi!”

She saw John Bucknill, who lived round the corner; trotting, he came, plying an umbrella in the air; and her heart somehow sank.

A small man, a florid face, a crop of fiery red hair, eyes crackling with vivacity.: and here was a man who had the air of knowing his way about—business-manager of a sporting paper, who knew his City, and was in the swim, a man alive. Yet what he called “the luck,” and “fortune’s wheel,” had not, so far, crowned him: he felt a touch of reproach; but vast was his self-reliance, his hope.

He never, for one thing, doubted that “the old lady” would leave him the oof, given which fulcrum he had the lever of “a scheme” in him that would lift the world. Meantime, he cut a figure, his frock-coat tails ballooning out behind his breezy career through life, his little hands nothing but finger-tips in their cuffs, in his being a hint of finance.

“Well, this is quite a meeting.” He shook Agatha’s hand. “I should think it is quite a year—though, if you care to believe me, I am *continually*

promising myself to go to hear—what's-his-name—Cousin Hugh. How's Hugh?"

"Thanks... And you?"

"Fit, fit. Yes, I am *always* promising—but you know what the City is. I do assure you, Mrs. Ettrick—or Agatha, for we are cousins, after all—when I hear the chapel-bell on Sunday morning—— But the

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difficulty is to screw oneself to concert-pitch! However, rely upon me, I go."

But there was a sermon to be prepared by somebody, it was getting late, and she said: "Yes, come. I must ask you now——"

"Busy: I could see that; good-bye, and rely upon me: I shall be there—to-morrow morning. But only the sermon, not the — ha, ha! At what hour does what's-his—Cousin Hugh—begin to hold forth?"

"Before twelve: but he will not be preaching to-morrow."

"I thought he—— Going to take another man's place?"

"No." He saw her eyes drop.

"But, talking of Miss Natalia," he suddenly said, "do you know I've been thinking the whole matter over? Why shouldn't Hugh and I arrange to split the luck, going halves, whoever wins? I have half a mind to go straight now—— Hugh at home?"

"No."

Too curtly said, with a pressing of reticent lips: and he speculated upon her. The question arose within him: "What can take a parson away?" No branch businesses, no bad debts, only an aunt. And he said, in a different manner, meaning business: "Hasn't gone down to the old lady's, for instance? Let us be frank with each other."

Her blood jumped to her face...

"He *is*, then," he said. "She ill?"

Now she lifted her eyes, bright brown, to his; and boldly: "Yes, then."

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"Ah, you see. Well, I bear no grudge. All's fair in love and war. It's not too late."

"For——?"

"Going down"—he glanced at his watch—"I shall just catch the 4.15. And let best man win! If it's Hugh, I shall look up to him as a 'cute one; if

it's I, see if I don't make it all right with him afterwards..."

He was gone; and she, feeling defeated, walked on to knock at Mr. Cox's.

There she was ushered into a drawing-room crowded with ornaments, grasses, musical-boxes, a big table with symmetrical books—difficult to turn in! And it was dim in there.

Mrs. Cox was out, but in came Mr. Cox, large, well-nourished, with an unharnessed and lazy air— Saturday afternoon being his holiday and debauch of indolence; and he was inwardly bitter against visits then.

"Ah, and how is Mr.? Be seated, be seated"—his chair creaked to his sitting.

She sat under "God Bless our Home," he in an easy-chair, in the easiest posture, both hands bulging his pockets.

"I am come to ask a favour——"

A throe of alarm—a presentiment of pains. "Another one?"—smiling sickly.

"And you are going to grant it."

"You don't mean——"

"He *had* to go——"

Now he was roused. "But this won't do at all, Mrs. Ettrick, and that's plain talking. The Merthyr Street people are not going to, they want the Word

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from their minister—— But first of all, Ma'am, let me hear what it is you want me to do"—his flesh dreading the gash of her answer.

She said it bluntly: "To preach for him."

He groaned, too gross to run that course.

"To preach again? Don't say it, Mrs. Ettrick!"

She put her hand on his arm. "He had to. And even so, he did not wish—it was *I*—and when you close up your sympathies against us, it is —*me*—you hurt——"

"Stop! I'll see. Don't take it——"

"And it can't happen again. You know about his aunt: she is dying. And you know our life as we know it—pretty poor——"

"Right!" he cried, "not another word—I'll preach."

She broke down, her mouth working, he patting her arm, with "Never mind! How was I to know it was solid cash he was after? Quite right, quite

right. And you'll forgive a rough old bear talking, won't you? There, there..."

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The next morning half of the congregation came expecting to hear Ettrick; but, as some already knew that Cox would preach, the usual al fresco gossip on the steps outside spread the light: so that when eleven o'clock struck, hardly anybody was ignorant of how things stood. Now, in that mass of Mr. Cox dwelt dulness, but his discourses got a glamour from that stationery-business of his in the City: so the people sat fairly content till, from Wortley's, the clockmaker's, near, they heard the strokes of eleven.

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Mr. Cox, however, was late: and Leonard, the private-schoolmaster—a little stout man with a beard, but no moustache, stern in the upper-lip—looked over to Boyd's, the grocer's, pew to shake his finger at the face of the chapel-clock with an indulgent smile, meaning "Late! But to err is human." For to wait for Mr. Cox was one thing—but if it had been Hugh Ettrick!

Ten minutes past; the quarter struck.

Now through the chapel a murmur droned.

It was unlike Mr. Cox! And Mrs. Ettrick, who should have there to act, was not in the chapel. Merthyr Street sat as it were abandoned, everyone fidgety, many pleasantly sensationalised, some vexed. A member began to make signals to a member a long way off.

"Something must be wrong!"—Leonard to Boyd—"I'd better go and see."

He had risen to go when the door behind the pulpit opened, a minister walked to the pulpit, knelt in silent prayer.

But not Mr. Cox! *Who* was it?

Mr. Cox had not a head of flaming red hair! Was not an awkward youth! All brows puckered in a sort of incredulous scrutiny, and Mrs. Leonard leant far to tell Mrs. Boyd: "Why, it's a perfect stranger!"

A perfect stranger, and a babe to feed the strong—with a gown on! An astonishing thing, and also a little funny! Ettrick never wore a "gown:" Mr. Cox would not have sat and listened to a youngster thumping at him in that rumpled thing. What, then, could be up with the world?

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"This is all a great farce!" Mr. Leonard whispered, stern in the upper-lip; and Mr. Boyd: "It isn't hardly decent!" For he might be a Jesuit—with his red hair; or teach "justification-by-works;" or dance jazzes. Who could say? And where, then, was Mr. Cox?

Hard were those faces that looked up at the minister. And of this he must have been conscious, for when he lifted the hymn-book his hands so shook, that he had to put it back on the cushion...

There were "the lessons;" and stammered lessons they were, in a frail novice-voice, timid of its own sound; and another weak hymn, in which hardly anybody would join; and, presently, an extempore prayer.

The prayer was a "truce of God:" for, though the minister seemed not to know what he was saying, yet at the close there was a something, a tone, a plaint of pain... and all rose in a more favourable mood. Then another hymn, not so thin a failure as the last; and now the Book lay open for the discourse.

There was an interval devoted to the respiratory organs, a general preparation of nostril and throat; and the coughs of the Misses Wixley in the fourth middle pew were perhaps a little *too* shrill to be natural. Weakly came the text: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth;" and at first it seemed certain that the preacher must break down under the greatness of his burden, he was so eaten up with confusion...

He says something—now with a blush is correcting himself—tries again. Now he is going on to speak

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of that model of meekness; and, stay——this theme seems to check a little that reel of his brain; he is speaking now with a certain break in the voice, as one who feels, and, his utterance gathering strength, presently he makes a gesture, his first: he has lily fingers. It would seem that the noise of his own voice gives him heart, for it swells: it is sweet to hear. And is he not, after all, something of an orator, grand to hear, the little man with the gown? Now he throws off, once and for all, wholly as a mantle, every token and remembrance of embarrassment. It is like a breaking of the sun through vapours—a magic transformation—thrilling! He stretches his arm; his form swells; all at once he is seeming *taller!* And these are not the old words—singular thing this Sunday morning, ideas are about... The mood of the seekers after truth, of the men of science, was truly meek. And "*they shall inherit the earth.*" When? Already! But the grand inheritance was afar. Thus

the eyesight of the race was being trained to range beyond the ages... Not words, but thoughts-and-words—in the combination called oratory. Those eyes of Merthyr Street opened slowly wide; and from deep sleep their souls awoke. “Yes, a born preacher!” was Mr. Leonard’s agitated whisper: for Merthyr Street was nothing if not knowing; and that an extraordinary being, by some miracle, was talking there to them that morning they determined with certainty. When that new music finally ceased, the people heaved a sigh...

Now, Ettrick after sermon always came down to the communion-rail to speak a little with the

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“pillars;” but this day, before they could rise from “benediction,” the pulpit was empty, the stranger had vanished.

As to the cause of Mr. Cox’s failure to appear, from a daughter of Cox the rumour soon spread that Cox had fallen and sprained his arm...

Then all went away in wonderment—half vexed—gloriously pleased—in every head, on many tongues, this question: What would Merthyr Street grow to, if *he* became its preacher?” It would become rich —famed —central —emptying every church in the neighbourhood...

For the night-service the chapel was thronged. But, instead of the young preacher, there in the pulpit was only old Mr. Magennis, dullest of all the “locals” of Merthyr Street.

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At the hour when Ettrick’s substitute was electrifying Merthyr Street, Ettrick himself was strolling in the garden behind Miss Ettrick’s house among peony and pea, plum-espaliers, rose, asparagus. In the orchard beyond, a mare, no longer young, was making spurts at trotting, feebly frisky, taking her pleasures sadly; there, too, as one strolled without malice, would arise grunts of suspicion in clumsy escape—the sow, with a tin roller at her nose: a placid morning, to Ettrick a Sabbath morning in paradise after Kingsland; and yonder on the ivy of the house rested a sunbeam, the house itself being unpicturesque, four-square, yet somehow different from anything in Kingsland.

Ettrick had already seen Miss Natalia, prayed (unasked) at her bedside, and was now bending over

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the wire-net of the fowl-house, when he heard a step, and, looking, saw—John Bucknill.

Bucknill had come across fields by the back; and he said: “Ah, Ettrick. And here I am, you see. Aunt Natalia going better, I trust?”

“Good morning. Yes: but—feeble.”

“And about the will?”

“Will?”

“Now, do let us be frank—I only ask to know the facts.”

“I have no idea of my aunt’s——”

“That’s all right—don’t say a word. And as to your coming down, don’t think that I blame you one bit, for I am the same kind of man myself. Why, I got it from your wife.”

“Indeed?”

“Met her in the street—said you were here—and here I am.”

“Well, Aunt Natalia is in that room yonder. She is, I say—feeble. But, if you like, I will report your coming.”

Bucknill smiled at this, with “I know where my aunt’s room is;” and he added.: “See if I don’t fill you with admiration at the way I bring her round”—he was away, drawn sideways by his bag; passed through the kitchen, hobnobbed with two servant-girls, then was tapping at the august door. Miss Ettrick said “Come in,” and, Bucknill standing in the middle of the room, they two gazed at each other—Miss Ettrick being a large lady, with a broad brow, bright brown eyes, a Roman nose.

Now, between her and Bucknill there was a quarrel over some money given him by her to invest, and

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she had forbidden his presence in her house. But she showed no surprise at seeing him; only, during their mutual gaze, her hand slowly moved to a brush near her, and with sudden energy she flung it at his head.

Bucknill caught it in his left hand.

“One for me, Aunt,” he remarked.

“Go!” She pointed toward the door, her voice still bold and masculine.

He did not answer, but, stepping to the bed, firmly grasped her two wrists, and kissed her deliberately on the right cheek, and on the left.

Patiently, without a word, she bore it; but her lips were whistling, a calling sound, hardly audible, which Bucknill noticed, and wondered, but

did not wonder long: for he had left the door ajar, and a mastiff with a hairless tail that flogged like a thong dashed in.

“At him, Nash! Good dog!” cries Miss Ettrick, sitting up, wondrously animated for a dying woman.

Nash’s throat growled once, gruff and harsh, and he made no delay.

Flight was useless—in an instant Bucknill realised it; when he made an agile dodge toward the bed, Nash, too, twisted, and he was cornered. But when the hound reached the man, he found a creature snapping soothingly with thumb and finger, going “Nash, Nash,” and offering the luxury of a bowl of Miss Ettrick’s gruel caught up from a bedside-table. After one half a doubt the hound succumbed, shut up his lids, plunging his tongue into the mush.

And one who knew Miss Ettrick would now have been aware, from something in her prominent eyes,

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of pleasure working in her internals. “Same old John,” she was thinking —“ready, self-protective, a real little man, his mother all over.” But meanwhile her forefinger was pointing, her bass voice saying: “Leave my house!”

“You *really* want me to, Aunt Nataly?”

“Get you gone!”

“Good. Of course, I want your money, and am come to get it. But I have a tidy little pot of my own; and remember—let me once cross that threshold, you can send after me, but I don’t come back. Is it go?”

Still her finger pointed, and it looked as if she would next say “Go!,” but she said: “You may hand me my medicine.”

Ten minutes after which Ettrick entered to the bedside, took the “dying” hand, asked how she was doing...

With closed lids she murmured that she felt better.

“Shall I read you a chapter?”

Miss Ettrick opened her eyes to turn them to Bucknill; Bucknill looked into Miss Ettrick’s eyes: and between those two there passed—a smile.

An hour afterwards, when the nephews were about to sit to “dinner,” Bucknill put his hand on Ettrick, saying: “Now, Ettrick, look you, I am not a bad sort, though I do know how to look after the £.s.d.; and I give you a hint to make the fighting fair between us: don’t you worry Aunt Nataly with too much reading and so on. She isn’t that sort at all, except when she is at

death's door, as it were. What Aunt Nataly wants is tact—just that. You just nicely get round her little feelings, and she's as

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tractable as treacle. Take my tip, now, you'll find it work."

Whereat Ettrick felt despair! conscious of a stiff lack of faculty within him to get nicely round Miss Ettrick's feelings. Here Bucknill was the better man.

It was, in fact, merely some unease in the valley of shadow which had caused Miss Ettrick to send for Ettrick. But that (Sunday) night the doctor, in passing out, told the nephews that the danger was over: Miss Natalia would rise again to her watering-pot, her hive, and dividend Coupons, though it was sure that she could not survive the next attack.

Four days before this she had "devised and bequeathed" her all to Ettrick, but had not signed the new will till Ettrick should come; and, though Ettrick's obedience to her summons had been so prompt, on the Monday, when the solicitor anew sat by her bed, the whole current of her sympathies was turned. She had Ettrick's name changed to John Reginald Bucknill.

"Happy man!" was the comment of Forrest, the solicitor: "You do not split the favours, then?"

"No, let my little fortune pass undivided," she answered: "and I may as well give it to the business man of the two—the one, moreover, who amuses me."

And said Bucknill, as the solicitor drove away, after chatting with the nephews under the porch: "I told you so, Ettrick; too much soft-soaping would never do it With Aunt Nataly."

"Ah?" went Ettrick.

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"Well, I know the meaning of a lawyer's handshake at my time of life."

So the next morning Ettrick started back for London...

Even in that terrible battle of "tact" for Miss Ettrick's favour his thoughts had been of Merthyr Street and the arrangements on the Sunday Agatha's one postcard had said nothing as to that. She was evidently busy.

• • • • • • •

She was in the thick of a pudding when she heard his step, and, with an "Oh!," pulled down her sleeve, running to be on his breast; then, after

moments of dumb love, said: "The news bad, then?"—his face as vernacular as the alphabet to her eyes.

"John Bucknill," he said, "has been at Up Hatherley."

"Yes, he told me——"

"With *him* I can and will enter into no competition!"

"Never mind: he is poor compared with you"—fingering his ear absent-mindedly.

"Aunt Nataly sends you her regards."

"She is not——?"

"Oh, no, quite alive."

"So the journey was absolutely—— How sorry I am, darling, that I made you go!... And you come looking not well."

"I'm afraid—ah, yes, there's something—I feel it in here." He tapped his temple.

"Pain?"

"A fullness, a weakness. To tell the truth, I'm

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ill, Aggie. Oh, I know what it is! A month's forgetfulness of Merthyr Street
——"

She looked away, woebegone; but suddenly brightened, clasped him tighter, whispering: "All's well with the world."

"Ah," he said, "things look a bit darkish, inside and out! My faith wants a tonic, the candle of hope a snuffing. On the other hand, I have you."

"Poor old me—not overmuch, I don't think."

"Multiply everything by infinity—that's you."

She kissed him for that. Add to two sweethearts the unanimity of friendship, and you have their intimacy.

"But tell me about Sunday: everything all right?"

"Considering."

"Good. How did they take my going?"

"Grumbled, of course, for 'tis their nature to; but this time, I fancy, were exceptionally good. I won Mr. Cox, in fact, and that's always half the battle."

"So whom did you get to preach?"

"Mr. Magennis."

"I thought you might have got Cox."

"I tried, and he promised, but, in coming, fell and sprained—— Bessie Cox ran to tell—Oh, Hugh, I *was* frightened at the thought of the empty pulpit!"

"My poor——! But the service could have been turned into a prayer-meeting."

"Hugh, no: no more prayer-meetings on Sunday mornings. And when I remembered *who* had forced you to go, and why, Mr. Cox's fall had for me a

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significance—of Providence—of punishment—which was so *awful*——"

"Never mind"—he stroked her hand—"it is over now. So you got Magennis? What was the text?"

"Wicked shall be turned'."

"The morning text?"

"The night."

"And the morning?"

"Blessed are the meek'."

"Which was the best?"

"They liked the morning."

"Any more news?"

"I don't think—have hardly been out, not caring to obtrude the fact of our existence till you came back. And, Hugh—I shouldn't bring up about Sunday: it can only remind them of your absences; and, if they bring it up, turn the talk. Come—you are famished."

After a meal Ettrick made haste to demonstrate his return, and presently, in the Boyd's drawing-room, was telling of his journey, its result (for nothing was private in his life), nibbling Mrs. Boyd's delicate bread-and-butter.

"And now," said Mrs. Boyd—a Saxon Cockney, stout, flushed, short of breath—"we want a full account of the morning preacher, the secret of his powers, and—everything."

Ettrick sipped tea with underlooking eyes of mild surprise. He answered: "I thought you knew. Agatha got Mr. Cox, but he sprained his arm, so she was compelled to get Mr. Magennis. I am glad you liked him."

The two Miss Boyds began to titter.

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"Why, bless my heart, what are you talking about?" asked Boyd, a little man with a little voice.

"Mr. Magennis!" interjected Mrs. Boyd, with shrinking azure eyes of reproach: "I mean the *morning* preacher, of course!"

Ettrick looked about with widening eyes.

"You seem to be under some mistake," he said: "Maggennis *was* the morning preacher."

A laugh broke out which grated on his nerves.

"I say, Mr. Ettrick, have you seen your wife since you've been back?"—from Boyd.

"Why, of course."

"And did *she* give you to know that Magennis has got red hair?"

Ettrick, wondering if he was dreaming, went pale.

"You do not answer, Mr. Ettrick," said Mrs. Boyd, a nasty woman, full of snarls, drawls, and sarcasms: "did she tell you that?"

In his bewilderment he let slip': "She told me that Magennis preached—gave the two texts..."

And at once he was swallowed in shame: had admitted to these people—what?

Now it was the turn of the others to be astounded: the laughter died, eyes of dismay stared at one another.

"Hallo, here's something wrong," Boyd remarked: "you've made a mistake—she couldn't have told you that. Why, the preacher on Sunday morning must be the greatest orator in England."

The four witnesses could hardly be deranged, and it was as if the ground had failed beneath Ettrick's feet.

"I thought," he muttered—"I may be wrong—"

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while wonder grew in their eyes, all realising themselves face to face with a mystery, he sitting there an object of pity, the very expression of shame smiling.

Suddenly he rose, doddering, with "Excuse me—I seem to be in some mess—" started for the door, hesitated, looked foolishly round, moved anew, went wildly away.

The moment he found himself in the street words burst from his lips: "High God!"

• • • • • • •

He went gadding through gas-lit crowds like a man furiously busy, his blood now in hissing commotion, the town having for him a pandemonic tone, as though he beheld it through red-hot spectacles. A lie? But with what motive? His brain, working now with a certain furore like an engine liberated from the regulator, remembered that she had not formally stated that Magennis had preached in the morning: that, while cheating him, she had been careful to protect herself from an accusation—not the lie of a novice! In a dim alley, where each of his hurrying steps slipped backward in mud, he stopped to cry out: “But, God, this is too much for a man!”

A lie! In another street everybody seemed to read it scribbled across his forehead.

He found himself a hundred yards from home, and then, with a pang, remembered that he could not face her. His fancy saw her under the parlour-lamp, sewing, perhaps, the light on the brown curls, she wondering, perhaps, whether he would find her out! And it was as if his brain capsized, the whole thing, including the trip to Devon, becoming to him

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nothing but a dream in which his known world lurched into the distortions of mirage before him. With his palm across his brow, he turned back upon his steps, not knowing why; till, happening to come upon a familiar door, he stopped—the door of a Miss Grant, one of his Dorcas ladies, a “pillar.” He had the thought to test the reality of his senses by her evidence, and entered.

And “Back again, Mr. Ettrick?” Miss Grant said, all silk and mittens, “none too soon. I hope this is your first call, and that you have selected me as the prime depository—What is the matter?”—suddenly startled by his wild aspect, where he stood with one hand shivering on a table.

“I am—Miss Grant, excuse me—I have received——”

“Sit down.” She led him by the hand to a chair. “Is it that your aunt is—dead?”

He did not, apparently, hear!

She looked keenly into his face. “What you want is rest: no one need see you twice to see that.”

“I shall be going—soon. The hand of God is upon me. I could not stay”—drawing his palm across his brow with an expression rather distraught.

"A month's rest," she said, speculating upon him through one glass of her tortoise-shell: "and there is no longer any reason against it, since you have a substitute at whom we shall none of us complain."

His ear caught "substitute" "What substitute?"

"Rufus, the prince of preachers; Redhead, the

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mysterious," she said with shut lids: "give him to us, and we give you a month."

She rose to turn up the light, and, peering under the crimson fringe, said: "But first, tell me all."

He had the consciousness, numb as was his mind, that he must not say that he knew nothing, for then she would think that he, too, was—like someone else.

But she spread herself out beside him, saying: "Who is he?"

"He?"

"Why, whom are we talking about?"

"I—cannot say!"

"Are we not talking about Sunday's preacher?"

"I—suppose so."

"Well, but what is this mystery? Here is everybody pining to know everything, and not a word so far. It is rather astonishing! And why is Mrs. Ettrick hiding herself away? Surely it is no secret."

"I—cannot—I have not long been back——"

"But you have seen her! How singular that that was not the very first thing—I... Such brilliance, Mr. Ettrick! Such power! He sketched the millennium in a series of inspired tableaux that Mr. Leonard has dared to compare with Isaiah. We all pitied Mrs. Ettrick that she was not there to hear. By the way, where was she?"

"She was—in the chapel."

"Not there," said Miss Grant firmly.

"Ah, she was there, Miss Grant!" he cried, defending her against the world, for she had not told two—two were two too many!

And again she eyed him, like a specimen, through

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her glass. "I can only conclude that you are seriously unwell... But still you might believe one. Of all the extraordinary things! If I tell you——"

The rest was not said: he was gone.

He went home—something in his feet took him—to hide her in his arms, to tell her that he was hers, lie or no lie, in spite of earth, of—heaven: this impulse had him now. And she sat, just as he had pictured her, under the lamp, a bundle of socks in her lap; but her face pale.

He threw himself at a sofa-end, his hat down on his brows: did not speak; she did not speak; and morosely he contemplated her. The light fell upon the naked back of her neck down-bent; her face hung low, with open lips, her needle and the clock's hands the only things that moved. It was like judge and culprit there, till she flung away her sewing, leapt up, knelt before his knees.

“Tell me!”

“Where were you on Sunday?”

“Oh! the talkers!”—nestling closer to him; but now he jumped up, spurning her, leaving her seated on her heels, on which she half turned towards him, her eyes underlooking up at him.

And he, standing over her: “To-day you gave me an account of what passed during my absence: and—it was false.”

Her hands clapped over her face; a sound sounded out of her.

“Think of it! I pretending to be a man of God, doing my little best... A lovely piece of work, don't you think? Who the religious tramp may be whom you introduced into my pulpit I don't know, I don't

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ask; you have chosen to hide it: but let me tell you this, that the flashy cleverness of that man has brought out my dulness by contrast. It is *he* they want now—I hope you are satisfied. And when the knowledge of your lapse from truth becomes universal, as it *must*... Oh, no, I can't stand this house!”

She was after him, calling “Stop!” But, with her cry ringing in his ears, he was out by a side-door into the dim and dripping night.

• • • • • • •

For some days there was a separation, she retiring into hiding in the back-quarters with her maid Ethel, with whom she chummed in a charming femininity; and Ettrick ate, slept alone.

For she had said to herself: “It is in the interests of our future that he take the first step towards reunion.”

Meantime, peeping, she saw him go out, come in, knew all his movements—as the Unseen Ones peer upon men—fleet-footed to escape detection.

One day when he was out a letter marked “Urgent,” with the Up Hatherly post-mark, arrived, and she opened it—from Forrest, the solicitor: Miss Natalia had had the third, the last, stroke; and again that erratic character commanded Ettrick’s presence.

Before Agatha finished reading she had decided that Ettrick could not go: and she sat staring at vacancy, feeling herself weaker than this sphinx.

In the midst of her reverie a rap: and it was John Bucknill.

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For Bucknill, fearing some change of whim, had bribed one of Miss Natalia’s maids to keep him posted as to her health: and he, too, had received the news. Busy, he had no craving to go tearing down to Taunton, since the will stood in his favour—unless it was necessary; and he had come to discover if it was necessary. He said: “Now, Mrs. Ettrick, or Agatha rather—for we are cousins—you will call this neighbourly of me. I threatened you that I should be looking in some day. And how is what’s-his—Hugh? That was a bad beating I gave him the other day down Hatherley way: between us, he’s no hand at all with the old lady. Well, it’s only natural—he doesn’t know her, *I* do, and I am the only one that does. How’s Hugh?”

“Sit down. He’s so-so.”

Her eyes were on Bucknill, weighing, estimating him, her head at work. She guessed why he had come.

“And *you*—well?” she asked.

“Fit. Is—er—Hugh in?”

“No, I’m sorry.”

He smiled. “Gone down to Hatherley?”

She smiled, too. “Not this time.”

“Is he, by chance—thinking of going?”

“No.”

“Any news lately of the old lady?”

“Yes, I have news.”

She smiled continually, reading him through, measuring him as with a tape, her eyes bright and seeing.

“Bad news?” he insinuated.

“You shall see.”

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With her tripping run, she got the letter, handed it him.
He read, and drew in his breath.

“Nasty of the old lady, now, very. The old story: when she gets low she wants the parson; when she gets better it’s I. Not a word of this written to me. Don’t you think it a bit hard of that old lady, now?”

This frank casting of his care upon her did not amuse Agatha at the moment, who sat clasping her knee, meditating upon him, measuring him, and herself also, one eye smaller than the other.

“Will you be going down?” she asked.

“You may be sure. I suppose Hugh won’t let the grass grow under his feet either?”

“He can’t go.”

Bucknill looked very relieved.

And at that moment, coming to a decision, she stood up. “I shall be going for him.”

“What, you?”

“Yes.”

“But—you don’t even know her!” He passed his fingers through his flaming hair. “Is that fair?”

“Why not fair?” she asked.

“A man can’t fight against a woman.”

“But I deny that I am going to fight—unless someone chances to challenge me: going to see my dying aunt. Do excuse me——”

She ran away before he could answer, borrowed in haste her Ethel’s two hoarded pounds, and left on Ettrick’s desk in pencil: “I am going away from you. Don’t fret. It is for good. God bless. AGATHA.”

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She re-entered the parlour with a Gladstone bag.

“What, going at once?” Bucknill asked.

“I thought of catching the 12.15.”

“So do I.”

“Then, I shall be quite glad of your company.”

They were off. He, weighted with her bag, called a cab, gave her luncheon; and they travelled together like friends, he wondering anon

where what's-his-name could have got hold of such a jolly fine girl. Together they walked up the orchard, where the sow, grunting suspicion, sluggishly slouched from them, and the old mare frisked with little runs, and up soft stairs they plodded into Miss Natalia's chamber; but cold was the gaze that held up their advance in there.

"I have not sent for you"—Miss Natalia to Bucknill.

"Yet I am here, you see, Aunt."

"You have no right here."

"Never mind about the right, Aunt."

"And this good lady?"

"I am your niece, Agatha Ettrick."

"And what can I do for *you*, Ma'am?"

"Come, Aunt, come, not so much of your country manners before this lady!"—from Bucknill pretty roughly. "She has come to see you instead of what's-his-name, who's busy

"Are you glad he's busy, John?"

"I'm not sorry, Aunt. *I* am not busy, you see, and I'm here to look after my interests."

"Is that *your* reason, too, for being here, Ma'am?"

"Not altogether," Agatha said, and said no more,

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her eyes busy as a swarm of flies, taking stock of every object in the chamber, dwelling in active alternation on Bucknill and on Miss Ettrick; and no one seeing the upper half of the invalid so hard and formidable would have divined that under that eiderdown lay a leg already dead—a right hemiplegia.

Presently Agatha (uninvited) neatly laid her coat and toque on a sofa, and immediately seemed to find a good deal of silent work to do, straightened a blind's edge, studied the labels on a battalion of bottles on the mantelpiece, totally rearranged them, put fresh water into the canary's cage, Miss Ettrick's gaze anxiously following her in this, her pets being her babies.

It was at supper that night that Bucknill wished to know: "What do you think of her now?"

"Sulky!" went Agatha.

"Don't let her rough ways put you out."

"Oh, no."

"All that that old lady thinks about is her money—thinks everybody is after her to grab it."

"It is only the truth, if she thinks so."

"No reason for showing her horns as she does."

"She is not happy, that's why."

"Though you should be the last to take her part, so far!"

"She has splendid eyes."

After that supper Bucknill was discussing the prospects of "Westralians" by the bedside, when in sauntered Nash, the mastiff; upon which Bucknill whistled at him, but those ears like bags passed by him with deaf indifference, the dog going on to lay

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his jaw on Agatha's knee, his eye-whites uplifted in sheepish petition of a pat: Miss Natalia's eyes, as she talked with Bucknill, took this in; and later in the night when Agatha, on getting up to go, coldly said "Good-night," coldly Miss Natalia answered, "Good-night, Ma'am," but when Agatha was at the door, a voice came from the bed: "Your room has a south aspect on the hills, and, if you leave the blind up, you get a fine view, as you lie abed."

"Thanks. Good-night!"

In the morning when she entered the sick-room Bucknill was pouring out with trepidation a medicine-dose, and she saw the grimace of Miss Natalia at the gulp, and at the lemon sucked after; but when at noon, Bucknill being in the village, Agatha presented the next dose, it was mixed with milk.

Miss Natalia sighed, after tossing it off: "Yes, that's better; how did you know——?"

"Milk is the antidote to the taste of ammonia," Agatha answered.

"And how did you know there is ammonia in it?"

"I smelled it."

"Now, that's a thing I don't like, Ma'am."

"I am sorry. Pray stop being cross with me."

"I am not cross, Ma'am. Kindly pass me that workbox"—drawing from under her pillow a bunch of keys; and, on opening the box, she produced two £10 notes.

"What is that for?" Agatha asked, shrinking a little.

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"It is worth that, Ma'am, being saved from nausea three times a day."

"But why insult one?"

"No insult meant. Take, Ma'am."

Agatha took them, saying: "Well, they are my own now"—passing to the apple-wood fire, to hold the notes to it, and toss them flaring upon it.

She said nothing; Miss Natalia said nothing; and some moments later, judging Miss Natalia too steeply propped up, Agatha disposed her in the proper slope of ease. When this was done, Miss Natalia, with closed lids, mentioned: "You forget that your luncheon is on the table, Ma'am."

Agatha went below, where Bucknill, just come in, asked what he invariably asked as they sat to table: "Well, what do you think of the old lady now?"

"Oh, I like her!" she warmly answered.

"There aren't many that do, then."

"Not many understand her, I fancy. 'To understand is to pardon', you know; to understand fully is to love."

"I understand that bag of fancies right enough!"

"Do you?"

"Don't I, then?"

"Does any man understand any woman?"

"I understand Aunt Nataly right enough. Ask what's-his—Hugh—about that last time. But you may be different, I don't know. It would be a nasty thing of the old lady——"

"We won't fight," she said with her smile.

In the evening, as the clock began to strike eight in the sick-room, Bucknill sprang up with "Medicine!"

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At that very moment Agatha, too, happened to ask: "Shall I give you your medicine?" and the invalid glanced from one to the other; seeing which, Bucknill's heart suddenly took alarm, conscious that this thing might be serious: so, not waiting for the decision, he turned with promptitude to the medicine; but in that moment Miss Ettrick breathed, "If you please, Ma'am," and from that hour the manner of Bucknill underwent a change: every touch of levity vanished from him, he became intent, flurried, hardly any more left the bedside, the invalid's eyes following this new assiduity with a certain musing and twinkle of humour, which Bucknill marked, and became still more fidgety because of it. He now lost all his

gallantry, no more offering to accompany Agatha in her long walks after tea to Hadston, to St. Arvens, to Fletcherfield. It was an affair of £.s.d., and Number One first.

It was on the sixth evening that Agatha, still cloaked and toqued from a stroll, entered the sick-room—to meet a scene of uproar and confusion.

The lamp was not yet lit, and the room so dusky, that for some seconds she could not make out what the matter was; only, she saw the invalid sitting up in high excitement with a face of scare, shouting against the shouts of Bucknill and of two house-maids, who were rushing about among four apparently mad cats and three barking, darting dogs.

Soon, however, she understood...

Bucknill, in seeing to the canary's feed, had left the cage-door open in his new flurry, the bird had escaped into the room, and by magic all the cats and dogs had known that thing.

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Nor was stamping and shouting at them of any avail: there was no question with them as to whether the bird was to be eaten; the question was, which one of them she was to be eaten by.

In the air was a snow of flimsy feathers, and a pitiful flurry of fluttery pinions.

One window was a little open at the bottom, and, just as Agatha entered, Bucknill, spying it in his distracted rapture, ran and banged it down.

"Ah, that's right, John!" cries Miss Ettrick: "Oh, do, do, save the poor thing for me!"

Meantime, Agatha surveyed the commotion, took in its meaning: and her thought followed upon her sight, and her act upon her thought, like thunderclap upon lightning.

Quickly she tripped and threw wide the window which Bucknill had just banged down.

And now, in some moments, all was over, the loud scene subsiding into stillness, the bird having spurted through, to disappear like a bullet from Agatha's sight within a neighbouring wood.

When she turned inward Miss Natalia was lying back portentously calm, with closed eyes, quite pale; and in Bucknill's inwards was a glee that beamed in his face.

"Why, Miss, what did you do that for?" one of the servants asked.

Agatha did not answer. But the silence was presently broken by those venomously-compressed lips on the bed, saying, "That bird was *mine*, Ma'am!"

"We couldn't have saved it," Agatha calmly remarked, and walked out.

Bucknill laughed within himself, and that night at

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supper was once more his old self, confident, giving hints on "tact."

"Above all, be careful of her pets," he admonished Agatha: "I know the old lady—well, I ought to—and I give you my word she'll go down to her grave mourning for that snip of a bird."

"Which proves the gentleness at the bottom of her fine heart," Agatha said, as she went up to the sick-room; in going from which, she said at the door in a low tone: "Good-night."

No answer...

"Well, good-night," she said again, and went.

The morning after this she stepped without a word past Miss Natalia's bed, the bird-cage hanging in her hand, within the cage a shapely thing which spurted and chirped. The invalid opened her eyes to see her hanging up the bird in its old place, as if nothing had happened.

For Agatha, having taken away the cage, had hung it outside her window with food, and had sat half the night in still vigil behind her window-curtains, until the bird had returned to its habitual berth.

And as she handed the morning dose, tasteless now, the old lady asked her, "What is your name?"

"Agatha."

"Agatha, is it?"

In the dusk of that evening, Agatha, for the first time, was seated by the sick-bed, they two alone, and a confirmed stillness brooded in the room, where no sound was heard but a drowsy chirp anon, and the soft plodding of a clock by Boule, like a pair of fairy-clogs jogging on their journey up the stair of

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Eternity. It was pensive there, with a sense of the vast dark that came and came.

Miss Natalia's hand was clasped in Agatha's; and presently her lips stirred.

“Are you religious?”

“I love God.”

“Love God: that means nothing. You can’t love what you know nothing about.”

“Oh, but, come! If some unknown thing sent you a pudding and a rose every week, you’d love it. We love what makes us happy—can’t help. And I’m often happy—blissfully. No disease; hardly a fear: no pterodactyl tracks me, no ichthyosaurus crawls to crack me. My sky, once luridly brown, is now—ah, yes, by Heaven—most divinely blue. All this is a result of a thousand million years of God’s work on this world for me. And I can see that my son’s sons will be more blissfully happy still... I could no more help loving God than fly.”

“But when you have a headache with the due new moon—do you hate Him?”—from Miss Natalia.

“I never have! He made me well! And if anything is wrong, I don’t exactly *hate* Him—love Him with such a passion when I’m happy that it lasts over a little.”

“Some say there is no God.”

“Oh, but that’s a wrong use of words. ‘God’ is the English name of the Power, whatever Its nature, that drags the bedstead toward the ground, and rolls the zodiac. No living thing ever doubted Its existence.”

“Oh, well, there’s *Something*, that’s certain. But does that *Something* know and love?”

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“No, knowing and loving are clumsy modes of animals and plants on planets, and It is hardly an animal or plant. But we see, don’t we, that It does something that’s infinitely finer than knowing?”

“But is It good?”

“Hasn’t It made the sky blue, and is making it bluer? It puts jubilees and jigs into our bosoms. Since you and I are good——”

“I am not good.”

“But I have eyes: I know.”

“Ah, Agatha.”

“Poor Aunt.”

“Will you——?”

“Tell me!”

“Pray for me?”

“Haven’t I already? And with all my heart?”

“Not that I believe one word of it.”

“Look into my eyes, and see.”

“But what’s the good of praying, if He doesn’t know?”

“Oh, but doesn’t He do something that’s infinitely diviner than knowing?”

“Maybe—no doubt... no doubt... You seem to me a good girl, and a deep girl... I... like you.”

I love you.”

“Yes, and my money. Aunt Nataly is a lonely old woman, Agatha: never had anybody to love her, no, never.”

“She has *now*.”

“Swear that to me.”

“Why, I do.”

“Oh, then, kiss me, girl!”

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Again and again Agatha did this, with passion, on the mouth, Miss Natalia’s face now streaming with tears.

When Bucknill presently looked in he instinctively drew back.

• • • • • • •

As for Ettrick, he was at this time in the depths, his health breaking up, but still bound to “visit,” and at every visit he met the same plague of questions which he could not answer, the same praises of *that other* from nowhere who had supplanted him. When he plucked up courage to announce that he was as ignorant as they of the youngster, such a statement suggested jealousy of a rival, and produced a staring of eyes that was nigh to driving him to lunacy.

Meantime, Agatha had fled: her father was dead: he made no attempt to guess whither. “I am going away from you. Don’t fret. It is for good. God bless. Agatha.” Unfortunately, there was a sinister ambiguity in “for good.” “For our good,” did it mean, or “for ever”? A settled aching in the temples caused him to press them with his fists, he sitting in this posture half a night.

A “member” stopped to speak to him in the street, asking “So Mrs. is off from home? Dyett, the tombstone-sculptor, and I saw her going, tried to catch her up, but she got into a cab with the gentleman...”

Ettrick stared so, that the other said: "What, didn't know there was a gentleman with her? Red-haired, with a clean face..."

"Red-haired," "clean face"... There was that

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here which turned the sun to darkness for him; and there was a wildness in his face that day which drew the eyes of people in the streets.

"Red hair," "clean face"—of "the substitute"? Locked in his study, he had those words with him, steadily, like the pain in his temple, going over in memory everyone he knew, seeking red hair, clean faces. There was John Bucknill; but Bucknill entering a cab with Agatha seemed wild. He was led back to the young preacher; with him she had gone somewhere—"for good"—taking a bag! And something sowed in his mind an inference so vile, that he went sick at it.

After which a lurid light grew within him: for to the question "Why did she conceal all knowledge of this man?" darkness was no longer the only answer.

And this suspicion finished his degeneration. He now collapsed. When the absence of Agatha became widely known, and the simple question "Where is Mrs. Ettrick?" had the effect of setting him daft, the instinct of the hunted to fly for life—far from Merthyr Street—waxed keen within him.

And, as his mental soundness was now rather doubted, the Merthyr Street trustees and leaders were little astonished to receive one morning, each for himself, a request to attend a meeting in the chapel that (Saturday) evening.

A single gasolier gave a local gleam in the chancel region of the chapel, on the communion-table, too, being two candles: and near these, in a dejected posture, sat Ettrick.

"The pillars," straggling in, shook hands, ranged

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themselves in the first pew to converse in whispers: and in the atmosphere brooded something of hush, the Banshee, the mood of funerals.

They knew him—he a part of their life now, and not a bad part: there was boding of loss.

"What is it all about?" murmured the portly Mr. Cox, standing in a group of three at the pew-end.

And Leonard: "It isn't—resignation, is it?"

"What for?"

"There you beat me."

"If it is," said Boyd, "we don't get another like him, take him all round. Doesn't shine may-be, but—— Can't make him out lately somehow——!"

"Nerves!"—from Leonard.

"Seems to have something to do with that affair of Redhead," Boyd said.

"But in what way?"—from Cox.

"The woman at the bottom of it, as usual: seems to have said she was in chapel that Sunday morning."

"Well," said Cox, "if she said she was there, she was there "Yes, but, man alive, where's the good talking —?"

"And where's she now?" Leonard put in.

"That's what nobody seems to know!"

"Funny, the whole thing."

"Let us pray," said Ettrick; and they knelt. Then he sat again, and there was silence, till he rose again, white about the brow, his fingers trembling.

"Brothers and fathers: I have been among you

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five years now, and you have seen what manner of man I have been in all godly conversation, doing my best—never very much, God knows... You have loved me as fathers; I have loved you as a son and brother. But the time has come when I feel called upon to leave you—for God's sake and yours. I implore you, as you love me, not to press me for my motives. The soul is capable of pains *so* intimate, that to speak of them... You probably conceive that one who is dearest to me may have something to do with this meeting, and that I won't deny. More I do not say. Only, the priest and his household must be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing: so much I say... Whither I now go—what do—I should tell you as friends, if I knew, but all is dark before me: for I retire from the ministry—have written to the President. God has seen fit—but though He slay me"—his voice thickened, his lips pulled—"I recommend you to Heaven, I tender you my resignation."

As he sat, up sprang Mr. Cox, and low he spoke in sorrow... "rest assured that you nor your dear wife, one of the best of women, I say, is going to be forgotten here... Ah, if she were here now, this would not be!"

Ettrick buried his face.

“And when do you go?” asked Leonard.
“Let it be very soon—that I beg of you!”
“But you preach to-morrow?”
“Mr. Devlin has promised—I am so undone in health——”
“Still—you will say good-bye to the people! Once more, now.”

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“Well, I will”—he stood up.

• • • • • • •

He rose a shattered man on the Sunday morning, yet having to prepare a sermon by eleven.

And he seemed to think with a stone: at nine he had no sermon, nor at ten, when he lay on a sofa, conscious, but careless; but presently he leapt up, saying “I must;” and paced again.

But what was the text? He forgot for a minute. And he made no progress... Anon he would start awake from a species of doze, glance terrified at the clock, and say “I must.”

It was ten to eleven when the girl, Ethel, passing the study, heard a fall, peeped in, saw him lying on his face.

And as she darted away to seek help, she collided at the parlour-door with Agatha, the bag of the traveller in hand, and cried out, “Oh, I’m so glad! The master, Mum—fainted!”

“Bring water!”

By the time the water arrived Ettrick was already on the sofa, Agatha over him, as pallid as he.

As she moistened his forehead, eleven struck.

“Was he to preach?”

“His farewell sermon, Mum.”

“Farewell...”

“He’s resigned, Mum.” Smiling compassion, she kissed him hastily.

“Any brandy, Ethel?”

“A little, Mum.”

“Luck! A teaspoonful every five minutes—only a faint—don’t leave him: I must be off somewhere...”

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Now, the news of the resignation had, of course, spread far: and all, touched and troubled, had come to flood the chapel with that spirit of

exaltation with which, in crowds, one agitated breast infects another; under which condition even trivial incidents produce gales of sensation that afterwards seem curious.

The first incident of that Sunday of Sundays in the annals of Merthyr Street was the lateness of the minister: a lateness most painful, everybody being so disposed to be favourable to him now, to love him. He *should*, they felt, on that day, his last... By ten past eleven the whispering had swelled to loudness.

Now, however, there was little more delay. At twelve past a preacher stepped hurriedly into the pulpit.

Every eye communicated to some other its own wonderment, every heart throbbed... No valedictory Ettrick there! Once more Rufus, that gowned figure, the lily finger.

But not rushing into blushes of confusion any more': exalted rather, fevered, a light in those eyes, those cheeks white with some emotion other than fear.

The one cool person in that chapel was John Bucknill, who, with the modesty of a man who feels himself a foreigner in a sanctuary, sat far back —his presence there being due to Agatha, who now occupied in his admiration the place of some female Cæsar. There he sat, bored—till the preacher gave out a hymn; and then he started, interested, leaning to peer...

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But onward to the sermon was an irksomeness, everybody was so urgent to revel afresh in that oratory once heard: for the mystery of the appearances and disappearances of this strangely-gifted being added to him something of the glamour of an angel, or visitant from some other globe. When the last verse of the third hymn died out, they sat as to a banquet of wine.

Whereon the Book was opened; and at the last moment he muttered low that Mr. Ettrick had had an illness, but would presently be well...

Then with a face that exulted upward, he exclaimed:

“Sing unto the Lord, O my soul! On an instrument of ten strings make melody.”

And with such *heart*, that at once they were under his spell... No “notes” now, as that first time, it was observed; nor was this so much a sermon as a dithyramb, cast off like the minstrelsies of psalmists and bards: for, perhaps from lack of a second’s space for preparation, not concepts, but

just words, were the mark of this sermon, song-words that seemed psalmodied in harmony with some orchestra of inaudible psalteries. “On an instrument of ten strings make melody...” And what a tumult of music, men felt! Yet there was something trying also in the performance, like the sight of a man walking the tight-rope over Niagara Rapids: a morbid rapture, an effort of the mind too high, a weakness somewhere, which afflicted the hearers with an instinct that it *could* not continue. For the flight this time was “all of a piece”—not meat here, with manna there, and a transitory transport of oratory

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yonder, but one torrent, the preacher appearing eaten up by the zeal of expression, and for minutes his lids lay closed, as if in deep delight at the melodiousness of his own throat, while his palm waved gently to and fro before his face, as if to waft away the variegated graces of utterance that poured from his mouth like the variegated globes of soap-bubbles flying afloat out of a pipe’s bowl. But how dear this exaltation was costing him presently got to be no longer an instinct, but obvious to everybody—when, anon, his pallor grew ghastly—when he stopped dead, looking giddy—when, having got to the peroration, which darted like a lark to prate in the air, he halted, again gone pale—his forehead dropped, his body toppled forward upon the Bible in a faint.

That instant was the climax in the history of Merthyr Street. All having already been wrought to ecstasy, this incident filled the building with hub-bub, many rushing up the pulpit-steps, among them Bucknill, who, even from his distant seat, had long since foreseen what was coming. They bore the body to the door behind the pulpit, down the four steps, to deposit it on a sofa in the parlour.

But the amazement of the elders as to the strange *dress* of the preacher was only increased when Ettrick, now recovered to consciousness, tottered into the parlour, with wildness in his eyes, asking: “What is it, what is it?”

“Your substitute——” Mr. Cox began to say.

“Mine! How dare the man say—?”

“Open your eyes, man,” Bucknill quietly said, “it’s Agatha.”

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Backward he staggered, then forward, to drop upon his knees, to peer into her, to snatch off the red wig and recognise it as an old charade-wig, to

recognise “the gown” also, and then, with a witless grin, to keep on repeating, “Why, she was true, she was true,” till his forehead dropped upon her, with sobs.

• • • • •

Late that night they stood together gazing out at their “garden”—the two shrubs, the geranium-bed, over which some moonshine dozed, with still some drone of the trams, more sad and drowsy still at this hour. And at that window was subdued talk full of the human heart, and holy stillnesses, and a feeling of peace.

Ettrick asked her: “Did she die well?”

“I say yes.”

“A sudden change of temper, then.”

“She was the gentlest soul, will you believe me?—who had never been loved. The moment she suspected the presence of love, her heart was like a rose that blows in the morning—lovely!”

“How little I understand... But, Bucknill, did he seem cut up?”

“I was surprised—took the beating with perfect dignity, threatening now to get married. Mr. Bucknill is smitten.”

“With you, Aggie?”

“With a thing named Woman. I have promised him, by the way, the farm called Wood Deep, and for that he undertakes to come to hear you once a month.”

“So I stay on at Merthyr Street?”

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“Where else, Hugh?”

“My resignation was formal, you know.”

“Can a minister’s resignation be formal when his wife is in the country?”

“Well, let it be so. But, I’m afraid, it isn’t I they want now.”

“Oh, they’ll forget the substitute! A well Aggie is better than an ill Hugh; but when we get back from the Black Forest, we’ll be ‘as we were’.”

“But, Aggie, tell me, whence this gift of preaching? Unsuspected thing
—!”

“Which of us suspects himself?” she answered with a gaze into vacancy: “I think that each of us is a treasure wrapped in clay, till the Djin comes with a talisman to unearth us. It is strange, in my case, how just the sound of my own mouth in the presence of a crowd transported me into

atmospheres where I saw man, myself, God, in a wonderful glow. But, after all, am I not a daughter of parsons? It isn't odd. Yet, oh, Hugh, the stab of bashfulness that first time when I fell from the skies and realised what I had dared and done!"

"I think I guess"—he touched her hand.

"I should have told you," she said, "but my feeling of—Oh, great are the preaching, teaching women, I don't say no, but I am never one: constitutionally I shrink—like the tooth from crude fruit. So I had the hope—foolish it proved—to keep you from knowing of my wee plunge into notoriety, which nothing could have brought me to make but my awful feeling that Mr. Cox's fall was my fault—a punishment for my money-grabbing..."

So they spoke low, till even that droning in the

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street ceased to drone. And suddenly Ettrick: "Why, he that getteth a wife getteth a good thing! like a new faculty, by which the Art of Life becomes practicable to a man. Well it is to have you, after all!"

* * * *

When this tale had been told, cheering broke out, some of the men feeling a little timid of their capacity to surpass a tale related with so much charm of manner, enhanced by that orbed voice of Lord Archibald. Tom Bates in particular, having a little stutter in his tongue, felt his heart sink, even as he said to himself, "Oh, well, never say die," and his clapping dominated all the clapping, while a Miss Clode murmured to another girl "I fancy, though, that when Hugh said to Agatha 'he that getteth a wife getteth a good thing', he was thinking of Joy, not of Agatha!" In the midst of all which comes Joy's Aunt Anne in a flutter to sit by Joy, and ask in a clandestine way "Well, Joy, what do you think of the tale of Hugh and Agatha?"

Joy turned up a smile toward her aunt, but answered not a word.

At the same time that privileged free tongue of Fragson, the critic, the Socialist, was calling out "It is an impossible tale!"

"Why is it?" retorted Tom Bates challengingly across the chattering: "I ca-ca-call it splendid."

“But the religious views of Agatha!” called Joy’s

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Aunt Anne’: “goodness! so unorthodox for a parson’s wife and a parson’s daughter! Why did the girl venture to assert that our Heavenly Father does not know or love anything? He is *Love!*”

“Oh, but,” Fragson called across the chattering, “if He is Love, He can’t love, you know. Swiftness can’t fly, though a swift can; hunger can’t eat, though a glutton can; love can’t love, though Don Juan can.”

“Oh, Mr. Fragson, you always——” Joy’s Aunt Anne retorted... “How could He make *us* to know and love, if He does not Himself know and love?”

And Fragson: “Well, but He made us to sneeze and sleep and think: He surely doesn’t sneeze and think Himself.”

“He *thinks*, decidedly!”

“But you want to be orthodox, and it’s unorthodox of you to think that He thinks: for it is orthodox to think that He foreknew everything from eternity: in which case He can’t think, since there’s never anything left for Him to think about. If something *could* arise to tempt Him to think, He’d swear and say ‘Oh, God, I can’t bother: I foreknow what I will think; and it’s better to be dead’.”

“Oh, but that sounds like irreverence,” Joy’s Aunt Anne said with a pout.

“*Sounds* like? It is irreverence—it’s disdain: not, of course, irreverence of The Reverend, but disdain of an African conception of it. You don’t blame a white man for disdaining Zulus.”

“Oh, you are not the only white man”—Lady Sartory flushed—“others may agree with the Zulus——”

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“They aren’t really white,” Fragson said—only pretend—black inside. It is thoughts that matter, not skin; and they are Zululike, if they have the identical thoughts of Zulus. As to whether or not they *have*, is not an opinion, but a question of fact, which you can easily settle by reading about Zulus.”

“Then, I say——” Lady Sartory began.

But at this point Sir Jocelin Abercrombie of the Psychical Society, the mystic, who wrote that learned work “The Targum on the Babylonish Talmud,” put in his oar, saying “I agree with Fragson that the events

probably did not happen as related, since a girl of Agatha's intellect would never be permitted to continue a sermon three minutes in Kingsland. If that's your point, Fragson ——”

“My dear sir,” Fragson answered, standing propped on a column, fingering the tips of his red beard, “the wife and daughter of two parsons is necessarily an enemy of society, an immoral character: I have no interest in such people; I declare that I am made of so much better clay than they, that I am unable even to *understand* their debasement.”

“But there happens to be a parson among us!” muttered with amazement the Comté de Pichegrue-Picard, too French to be capable of comprehending the reign of personality in English life, its privileges and monopolies, to do, and to say.

“Don't mention it,” lightly said Lord Archibald, who had chanced to hear: “my back is several times broader than Mr. Fragson's tongue.”

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“Not so high though,” Fragson answered with a nod. “Besides, Lord Archibald is not a parson, but a super-parson. And I can pardon a parson, but I can't pardon his wife and daughter. The parson does his evil, and draws his salary, with a thought in him that perhaps, after all, his evil is doing some vague good which he cannot see; but his wife and daughter live in the belief that evil is good, that dulness is Divine, that blasphemy is piety, and debasing babble light and life. It is my business to understand the human heart and mind; but I fail, I confess, to understand these hearts and minds. To me their odious sloth of soul has become fabulous and impossible.”

At words so earnest from so recognised a critic of things, everyone was stricken still some seconds, until Joy bent toward the sailor-boy, touching him with her shoe, to say low-voiced “What do *you* think of it?”

“Well, 'tis Fragson's nature to,” Bates answered: “I say that the world has never got along without parsons, and never will. No doubt there ought to be a new sort of parson now to suit the century, but that'll come in g-g-good time. I call it a splendid tale, myself.”

She bent still lower down to say to him “Can *you* tell one like that?”

“Oh, well, that's on the knees of the goddess,” he answered meekly low.

“But the goddess is blind—like Justice: no favouritism to poor Jack-ashore!”

“Well, I don’t know—you have seen and k-k-kissed me; you never saw or kissed any of these gentry.”

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“How do you—know, Tom?”

At which question Bates was so taken aback, so touched with shyness and jealousy, that he could discover no answer; and now, as tea began to be handed about, conversation again became general.

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CHAPTER II

THE next afternoon the weather was not less glorious, and when the groups had strolled down from the grounds to the grotto, Mdlle. Cazalès (of the *Français*) danced a new waltz that was the *furore*, and then Sir Jocelin Abercrombie of the Babylonish Talmud went a little pallid a moment, as the others disposed themselves comfortably about him, on the lounges, on the grassy slabs through which the brook gabbled to its *chute*, or they sat by the alabaster balcony at the cliff-edge, on the square well in the centre, to hear him relate, while he stretched himself on a couch by the brook, frowning with his lids closed down; and now opened his lips to recount

THE TALE OF HENRY AND ROWENA.

The lady Rowena Howard of Iste had been ten months married, when—*again*—she was thrown across the path of Lord Darnley.

It was at the Palli Opera-house, where her opera-glass, in moving along the opposite row of “Nobility Boxes,” lighted upon that livid face and square forehead of Darnley, to find *his* glass, too, fixed upon her; and the mutual gaze of glasses endured some seconds, till she, suddenly paling, slightly inclined her head.

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When she was moving out from the play a man costumed as a Polar bear (Darnley’s secretary) contrived to drop into her parasol a card which bore the words, “May we meet? at the Meta Sudans”—it being then near 8 p.m., the hour when the Lenten Bell would sound the closing of the theatres, open since 10 a.m., that day being the Tuesday, the last—the maddest—day of Carnival, the day of the barberi and the moccoletti: and the cry of it was rising to the skies. For now the city had become one dizziness, its air dim with missiles, vehicles from every bye-street wending into the Corso filled with dominoes, pierrots, “marquises,” contadini—a chaos of plying arms, screams, contests, colours.

But Rowena lay back in her carriage, taking no part in this campaign—a lady of a large and languorous make, her thick lips scarlet against her

paleness, her globe of coal-black hair, and her throat's curve, giving her a certain resemblance to those beings of Rossetti's dreams. It had been remarked of Darnley standing near her that he was the shorter by an inch.

When her carriage had rolled along the Via Urbana to the Colosseum, Lord Darnley stepped to her from the shadow of the trysting-place.

"You see, me meet," he said.

And she murmured: "It is strange."

They moved to the mouth of a vomitorium, whence the ruin rolled in gloom before them.

"You are still everywhere, then?" she said smiling.

He replied: "I travel. Although we are souls

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that have sinned elsewhere, and the earth is our place of internment, happily we may pace in it."

"Ah, that black mood... You promised to be happy, Henry."

"Are you?"

"I am lately married to an old man—who talks of consols and stocks. Still, there are consolations."

"What are the consolations?"

"Wealth, the sun, the Carnival."

"After the Carnival, Lent," he mentioned.

"But before Lent, the Carnival!" she laughed shortly.

And he: "This is a new worldliness in you. The—husband's influence?"

"May-be."

"No, forgive me: I know that you cannot be other than yourself."

"I hope that I am all that you see in me. One, though, is not necessarily the equal of one's face. The most ethereal beauty whom I have seen is a cigarette-maker at Seville, who is weak in her head."

"I have never estimated you by your face," Darnley said, dwelling on that face with lowered lids, "but by myself: you are my double—or you used to be."

Her eyes dropped embarrassed at the flattery. "Well, if you say so... I—hope—it is true. You produce the impression more of some Olympian being than of man; as for me, I begin to fear that I am—much of a woman."

"The 'Olympian beings' are surely exempt from diseases of the skin," he answered smiling.

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(Five years previously, on the eve of his projected wedlock with Rowena, he had spent three nights in Iceland, that residence of leprosy, and presently three of the nodules of that disease had appeared upon Darnley's left arm, making him a pariah.)

"Not well yet?" she asked.

And he answered: "My disease is incurable."

"Alas! and mine, Henry"—with more of melancholy perhaps than was felt.

"I am here to cure you and me."

She looked at him dubiously by a moon that had just moved up, doubling the hugeness of the ruin, touching Rowena with a hand of romance and magic.

"And the cure is—the old cure?" she demanded, smiling: "the *rendezvous* in Nowhere?"

"Where souls really meet," he said.

She stood thoughtful some moments, hearkening to the vortex of the Carnival noising afar, hardly audible here.

"And you believe *still*, Henry, in the soul, the Hereafter?"

"There is the soul, the Hereafter. Do you not believe?"

"Yes, if you tell me so."

"I tell you so. I have known it for seven years. And *there* is cure."

"Tempter, tempter."

He, all the time, was playing in a pocket with two vials that hardly ever left his person; and now he said: "You consent?"

"Henry, I—have ties..."

"Possibly you no longer—love."

"Ah!"

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"You consent, then. At midnight, say?"

"Oh, no, I—— At least give one time."

"How much?"

"A month."

"Where?"

"At Naples."

He bowed. "In a month, then—at Naples." "Anyway, I shall be definite then."

He bowed. And now they traversed the vomitorium to part at the Meta Sudans.

By now the moccoletti *fête* was at full flood, a hundred thousand tapers rushing, raging, tossed in throng of battle, flushing faces on the balconies of fourth-stories, everyone bent upon safeguarding his own, upon puffing out some other's moccoletto, with bellows, extinguishers, extravagant fans... Suddenly the Lenten Bell put out every taper; but like dead champagne the throng remained, and it was long before Rowena's coachman, filching his steps with petty thefts among the thick of vehicles moving homeward, landed her at her palazzo, where a rather cold note from her husband told her that he had started out alone for the function which was to close the social carnival—the *bal masqué* at the Rondola Palace.

The Duca di Rondola (the same “Rondola” who was the naturalist, and had made his park into the famous “Rondola Zoo”), was that year the chief of Roman entertainers; and on this final night of all his halls were thronged.

There at midnight Rowena was: she was then dancing; but presently afterwards, to escape the press of the apartments, descended into the park.

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Her quest of dreaminess was not, however, immediately successful, for among flower-beds and bowers she encountered a multitude of couples, seated in cosiness or strolling, so that she penetrated ever farther into the heart of the park, until at a very shadowed part she remarked, coming toward her, a masked man of middle stature with a crimson calpac, a cashmere sash: on recognising his negro moustache, and that flashy gleam of his teeth, Rowena started...

She breathed “*You*” at their meeting: “I had no idea that you were here...” looking at him with a sort of awe, this *second* encounter producing upon her fantasy the impression that it had been brought about by his absolute power of personality and will to influence happenings; and she said: “Certainly, *this* meeting is singular: I came out seeking a dream ——”

“I intrude——”

“Ah, no: so Saul, who sought his father’s asses, found, Henry, a kingdom.”

“A kingdom and a tragedy.”

“Oh, man of the black mood. But better to die a king than live a peasant, is it not?”—this with her head held sideward, smiling a fond cajolery.

And he: “Or to die a ‘goddess’ than live ‘a woman’?”

“Tempter, tempter.”

“I asked a question.”

“I have answered! ‘At Naples, in a month’”—though, if she looked well into himself, she might have discovered that her reply in a month would not widely differ from her reply that night; but the time

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and place were full of fays and flutes, a moonshine suffusing those shades with a mood of dreams, and Rowena returned ever, with a secret unease, to the subject, flirting, playing with such edged tools with a mysticism, and a melancholy, half infantile, wholly feminine.

“Yet we meet always!” she said: “what is it makes us meet?”

“In physics,” he replied, “there are atoms that find each other—cannot be kept apart. So in the region of spirit.”

“We are, then, altogether the creatures of Law?”

“Atoms are chemically impelled; spirits yield to the promptings of Fate.”

“So that our meeting now, for instance——”

“Stay,” he said, pointing, “*there* may be the reason for it...”

This happened in an avenue of lime-trunks standing behind sarsaparilla-hedges, the avenue being an incline, ending a little above the lovers in a kiosk that stood under a wall; and it was down the hill that Darnley, in saying “*there*,” pointed—at an object a longish distance off toward the bottom, where two Moorish lanterns made it visible: some dappled animal that with gracile gambolings was rambling up the avenue—toward them.

Rowena’s eyes fastened, widening, upon this apparition; she whispered: “What is it?”

“A Tsana panther...”

“Escaped?”

“Evidently. These woods, you know, are full of specimens——”

“But—it is approaching us!”

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“Not alarmed? ‘Una lonza leggiera e presta molto, che di pel mac——’”

“Henry!”

“Here is our cure——”

“Oh, not in *that* way, surely!”—fleeing a little, seeing the sleek creature, all silk, lissomeness, sinister prettiness, drawing rapidly nearer.

"But," Darnley now said, "the kiosk and wall close the avenue behind us, and there seems to be no outlet through the hedge: we are rather entrapped. If we were not, we should be chased in attempting to escape."

"Yet save me from this—pray!"

"You insist?"

"Why, of course!"

"But how?"

"No weapon?"

"No... I have this..." drawing from his girdle the curved blade of a pigmy canghiar, a plaything with an agate handle: "but this could merely wound, and a wound would merely madden—"

"Henry! How near it is! It has stopped! is looking at us!"

"Let him look. To a stranger you might seem agitated——"

"No! No! not agitated... But save me——"

"Let us now undergo——"

"How hideous! Save me, pray!"

"You do insist?"

"Why, yes!"—without seeing how he *could* save, yet having from of old a deep-seated confidence in the competence his will to perform miracles; and in truth he now looked from the brute to her, saying:

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"I *can* save you; but only in one way—by losing part of myself. Tell me how long I shall have to wait for you after?"

"Losing part'——? I don't under—— Any time you like! Only save one from——"

"To-morrow?"

"Look—it is moving again! Yes! Any time——"

"At sunrise?"

The beast was not now three hundred feet away.

"Yes!"

"You consent?"

"Why, yes—look!"

"You promise?"

"Yes!"

Without more delay Darnley now raised the canghiar: three rapid slashes ripped away the left sleeve of his tunic at the shoulder, and at a tug the sleeve fell to the ground, leaving the arm naked; whereupon the earl, who

was as learned an anatomist as he was a cosmopolitan sportsman conversant with the moods of animals, buried the blade in the flesh of his shoulder at the point where the humerus joins the shoulder-blade in a ball-and-socket joint, then dissected the next-coming vessels, muscles, periosteum, and then, by the art of a quick twist, infixed the point betwixt the cartilages of the joint. So wildly rapid, yet exact, were his actions, that they were well nigh over before Rowena, wan with wonderment, quite realized what was being done: only when she remarked the cataract of blood rushing down the blanched arm, saw his grim jaw fixed like granite, did she understand and give out a cry, while

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the panther, crouching now, sniffing the wind scarcely sixty feet away, gave out a whine...

And now, dropping the canghiar, Darnley grasped his left wrist with the other hand, tugged, wrenched the arm from the shoulder: nor was he a moment too soon, for the creature's eyes were already glairy with the greens of desire; but even as it evilly crept, its belly down on the ground, wriggling in a prowl to spring, Darnley was swinging the arm like a club, and he flung it wheeling, to drop before the beast's nostrils.

With instant glee the panther sprang upon the godsend.

Then a minute's waiting, until the animal was well engaged in munching with a sideward head and shut eyes, and now Darnley advanced menacingly upon it, stamping; upon which the panther, snatching up the godsend, growling, slunk farther down the avenue; again Darnley advanced, again it went slinking with its windfall; until at the avenue's end it slipped away.

Meantime, Rowena had stood rooted: but when she discerned that the earl was returning, she tripped down the hill to him. He was then holding his waist-shawl over the butchered shoulder, livid as mare's milk is; and she was as bloodless, at her consciousness that he had bought her with blood.

"I must—you see—leave you," he panted, all shocked, short-breath'd, letting slip incontinent breaths through his livid lips, but still smiling; and, in saying "I must leave you," he glanced as negligently to the left as at a rent in his dress.

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And she: "Oh, Henry, pray! pray! a doctor..."

He panted: "It is unnecessary"—callously as mortal man could—"I am at the Hôtel d'Espagne—not far. I returned—to say you—an *au r'voir*."

"Ah, Henry!"—placing her palm on his right shoulder, while he glanced fondly at her, saying: "So you give yourself at last?"

A dying "yes" sighed from her, her lips very near to his; but no caress escaped his will: she was another's—"till death;" after death his. Meantime, he was a man of honour, of inflexible integrity...

"At sunrise, then?"—from him.

Afresh dismayed, she started from him! "When is sunrise?"

"Half-past six precisely."

"To-morrow?"

"Why—yes."

"To be cut off... Well, but say seven, or—eight."

"Eight, then. Take this."

Letting the cloth drop from that round of red that spouted, he produced two vials, to present her one, and say: "Three drops."

"At eight...?"

"At eight... Arrivederci."

"Henry... *in God's name...*" she hissed after him.

But he was gone: and she, standing aghast there, gazed after his swaying gait wavering down the incline, for already he tended to dying, yet was heady as with wine. As for her, her heart, that struck slow and rough like hammer-strokes, was

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divided within her: she had to die—but desired life.

• • • • • • •

Rowena slept deeply from three until seven a.m.

The moment she opened her eyes she was conscious of a horror of oppression on her heart, and shuddered. But just as on other days she rang for her maid; presently lay in a wrapper of apricot brocade on a couch in her boudoir; murmured the word "Chocolate."

When she had sipped a little Spanish chocolate thick like soup, she sat some time under her maid's hand, musing on the luxurious movement of a comb through her hair; then dismissed the maid. By which time it was only twenty minutes before that fated hour, Eight: a bright, warm morning.

She put out her arm, took the vial handed her by the earl, looked at it, turning it, turning it, in her fingers some minutes: until now her mouth pushed into a *moue* of impatience. For Morning brings thinkings, Night being all another country and mode of being, upon which, and upon its moonshines and commotions, we look back by the sun's brightness with a kind of surprise and recovered sanity. Standing up, therefore, she now stepped on tiptoe to a casement, and let the vial slip from her fingers into a courtyard, listening to catch the flimsy crash of its fracture. Now, however, she was not less pale than death itself.

But to bear his contempt—he alive, she alive! This, too, was a kind of death, for she was a thing built by his opinion of her, and had long lived and had her being in the fantasy of his dream of her:

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so there she stood, waiting guiltily, letting the golden moments go, her hand pressing down her heart's extravagant gallop. At eight he would die—and now it wanted only seven minutes... She had to send to stop him: but should she not have sent *before*? Not let the golden moments go?... He was “at the Hôtel d’Espagne;” but whereabouts that was she did not know: and time had somehow slipped away, she had dallied, yes, her heart smote her hard, though the thought of his contempt—she alive, he alive—was hard also. She rang a bell.

And “Where is the Hôtel d’Espagne?” she angrily asked.

Her maid answered: “A quarter of a mile, my lady——”

“Fly with this—a mounted messenger——”

She scratched and dashed at the maid the flat phrase: “Pray do nothing.”

And the moment she was alone she locked her doors upon herself, in the instinct to hide away from sight that quivering that now potently reigned over her frame; then down she dropped upon her couch, her eyes shut tight.

Three minutes more, and the click of a little clock toward its stroke thrilled her through and through with its news: two, three—each to her like the booming of some drum of doom; four, five... the sigh that trembled from her breast at the fatal eighth was, really, a sigh of relief.

Farewell! She felt definitely that he was dead; and in that moment hated, revolted from, felt well rid of, him.

But orbless mortal! unconscious how all about

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the common object is the Myriad! and stronger than the obvious of things
the Bottomless that they blossom on!

It was not until ten minutes after eight that her messenger alighted at the Hôtel d'Espagne, to find it in a state of agitation: and he dashed away back laden with the tale that the death of Darnley had just been discovered.

But blank was his wonderment, on coming back, to find the palace of his master in a state of distraction precisely resembling that of the Hôtel d'Espagne! He was informed by his awed companions that through and through that part of the palace containing the Lady Rowena's apartments there had screamed forth, at precisely three minutes past eight, a cry so appalling as to paralyse all to the marrow, a cry at the same time soprano and guttural, at once wild and gross. But on running to Rowena's rooms the menials had been confronted only by bolted doors...

And toward afternoon all Rome was thrown into gloom by rumours of two dissolutions—a gloom intensified by an element of gruesome mystery that mingled with the melancholy of the event: for in the case of Lord Darnley the cause of death was readily enough traced to a very strong poison in use among Poona coolies; but in the case of the Lady Rowena every brain stood amazed. The mucus membrane of her throat, it is true, gave some vague indications, according to the doctors, of strangulation; but this statement was accompanied by the added statement that the fingers of the strangler (if there was a strangler) were of such a species as to

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leave not the faintest trace or impression on the snow of the lady's throat.

* * * *

The telling of this extraordinary event left everyone mute during a minute, no one remembering to clap, until suddenly those large palms of Tom Bates started to beat at each other with the intentness and absorption of one hammering repoussé-work in a fading twilight, making it obvious that, if the boy could not himself tell a tale, he had no less enjoyment of tales than had Joy herself.

The next to break the silence was Joy's Aunt Anne, who called out: "Well, the extraordinary thing! Did the thing *really* happen? or is it just a tale?"

"Not only did it never happen," remarked Fragson, who by nature was at loggerheads with Aunt Anne, as dog with cat, "but it is a mass of impossibilities."

"Oh, nonsense," the sailor-boy muttered at Joy's feet; "everything is impossible till it happens; the sea's an absolute impossibility—"

"How is it impossible?" Aunt Anne called back: "it was Lord Henry's spirit that came and took Rowena's——"

"Pardon me," put in the Comté de Pichegrue-Picard, "I think that that is not necessarily so. The Lady Rowena may have perished by self-suggestion —by terror of an idea: even those traces of strangulation

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within her throat may have been the effects of self-suggestion. It is clear that she feared Lord Darnley living; she would fear him tenfold dead; and her self-suggestion of danger from his 'spirit' would be intense."

"What do you say, Joy?" demanded a Miss Clode.

But Joy answered only with a smile.

"Joy is one of the sphinx-critics!" cried out Mddle. Cazalès, "all the more terrible for her smile which never says anything."

"Miss Joy understands," Fragson remarked, "that a man cannot cut off his arm——"

"No, really, Mr. Fragson, I do not know that," Joy hastily rejoined: "I dare say it is a question of the will. There was a Spartan boy who 'smiled and smiled'."

"Fragson, are you answered?"—from Tom Bates, with one eye shut.

"You can buy 'Answers' for a penny"—from Fragson, whose charm consisted in being rude to everyone, his loved-one included.

And "Oh, la, la," muttered Maître de Gaud, the advocate, one of the suitors, "this roughshod individual!" while Mons, le Comté de Pichagrue-Picard asked with his *sourire malicieux*: "But is it easy to get from it the simple answer 'Yes', Mr. Fragson?"

But now a quadroon who told "jumbee" legends made her appearance in the grotto, and the mood of the gathering underwent change.

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CHAPTER III

THE next was a day of gala—the blind girl's nineteenth birthday—a luncheon fête being held in the grotto, whose ferneries were hung with purple bunches of grapes, the girls crowning their brows with garlands of ivy, of vine, of violets, like bacchantes, having confetti entangled in their hair; and the men, too, who had been shooting *bécasses* in the coverts, and now were languishing, lay dashed with confetti and flowers, as they lounged about the marble margin of the brook, that moves lucid to its bottom down the bower, “although it moves brown, brown, under that umbrage, which never lets in there any mood of the sun or of the moon:”

Awegnacchè si mova bruna, bruna,
Sotto l'ombra perpetua, che mai
Raggiar non lascia sole ivi nè luna;

and when, after the luncheon, there had been much munching of pulps, and much sucking-in of junks of coloured ice, and dipping the upper lip into the colours of iced wines, and now the desire for eating and drinking was driven out, and Joy had touched her harp-strings toyingly a little, and some of the girls had whirled a little in dance on the slabs for the men to observe their grace of shape, yet not

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touch, Mons, le Comté de Pichegrue-Picard stood half-sitting on the balcony, looking at his boots, busily attending with thumb and finger to alternate curls of his moustache, as the *chef* potters busily betwixt the kettle and the pot: and he commenced to tell

THE TALE OF GASTON AND MATHILDE.

Among the tricks of the Will, ladies, few are more curious than that implied in the rhyme:

“Forgiveness to the injured doth belong,
But he ne'er pardons who hath done the wrong.”

For its truth see the newspapers: the Nero of the slum first really hates “the wife” when he has seen her blood, and the diviner her patience, the more unappeaseable his itch to watch her anguishes. Nor do we only hate what we have harmed, we love what we have saved—women especially, in whom the instinct to protect seems to be deepest-seated, in whom to suffer is to love—an index perhaps to the analysis of “the maternal instinct”—they hankering for the caress, not of the blessing hand, but of the blessed, panting for harmony with the heart they have suffered to succour.

An incident preserved in a bundle of letters in the possession of an ancient family in the Midi very well illustrates this... One night, late in 1788, a mob had gathered howling round the statue of Henri IV on the Pont Neuf, their excitement being due to the fact that Lamoignon, the hated “Keeper of the

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Seals,” had that day been dismissed from office. The Revolution had not properly broken out, but the populace was already “feeling its feet,” and all day in various parts of Paris a roar of pétards, fire-locks, fusées, had mixed with the rolling of drums and the rocking of the tocsin; the City Guard had everywhere fled before the playful roughness of the rabble; a number of wicker figures of Lamoignon were burnt; and on the Pont Neuf passers-by were forced to stop and exclaim “Long live Henri Quatre! To the devil with Lamoignon!”

This revelry was at its summit when a young member of the noblesse, Gaston de Liancourt, passed that way, returning earlier than ordinary to his garret from a scene of tavern profligacy at the Café de Foy. His coat, though still showing its frogs and laces, was ragged; his wig looked a dishclout; he wore no mantle. Gaston, in fact, had become the despair of his friends; had run through a patrimony in a night’s play; and now, as he stepped toward the Pont Neuf, his foot lagged staggering, in his eyes swam the rheum of wine.

The rabble, active as a cat, sprang upon him, insisting upon a repetition of its “Long live Henri.”

“To the devil with Henri Quatre!” he shouted, laughing, waving his arm: “Live Lamoignon!”

This daring was terrible. A sea of faces closed round him, cruel grins now giving place to looks of still grimmer significance. An aristocrat who

cursed the people's king? Was it so? In some moments he was nearly sobered, for a hundred hands reached to grab him, and a roaring grandly like the tigress's shook his high heart.

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"Let me go!" he gasped, pallid under a lamppost: "I will say what you like."

They loosed him; and now he cast his eyes round, hesitated, then with that same staccato laughter, shouted: "To the devil with Henri Quatre! Ha, Ha, Ha! Vive Lamoiignon!"

And ere the people could seize him, he, to their stupefaction, had sprung upon the parapet of the bridge, had plunged into the river, leaving his coat in their hands.

The mob sent up a shout—half applause, half rage; crowding along the parapet, they saw him rise, saw him making toward the bank; and a detachment ran yelling round to intercept him.

But Gaston reached the water's edge before them, shrieked out a jeer, dashed up a court.

And now a race: few swifter of foot than the young noble, but he was handicapped by his saturated clothes, his broken shoes; on the other hand, he had the advantage of the dark passages which he chose. Sometimes, for moments, he felt himself victorious, till, running forth into more open space, a roaring rose in his rear, swollen with new volunteers to the pursuit. Though originally of iron build, he had long been spoiled in wind by his life of riot, and there came a stage of the chase at which he began to gasp painfully. Many of his pursuers, too, had stopped by this time, but a straggling line of runners, still gabbling excitedly, gained balefully upon him. Meantime, the effort to live had intensified the love of life; his humour of devilry was quite extinct now; and he ran as if Death with Death's scythe was after him.

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All at once a cry of triumph started from the heated people: Gaston de Liancourt had darted into a cul-de-sac.

Now he stopped, desperate, a second, then, as the throng rushed to clutch him, he, drawing his rusty rapier, ran to throw his back upon the dead wall.

However, he found that it was a garden-wall—not unscaleable: so with his last powers he clambered to the coping, stunned by a thrown stone which covered his face with blood; but not too stunned for the jump: and now he found himself in a tangle of jungle at the back of a mansion.

On he stumbled at random, panic-struck now, lusting to live, until now a sound of singing met him, and in some moments he found himself face to face in the moonlight with a lady... She, having just issued out of a summer-house among bushes, seeing him gory, draggled, with the glare of a chased creature in his stare, shrank with a little shriek.

The daughter of the Comté d'Auvray, she was a lady of the Court of Versailles, then spending some days with her parents in Paris; and in the old days Gaston, not yet sunk into the abyss, had known her, had thrown fond eyes upon her, but “as they that have no hope her father and his had been friends.

“Mademoiselle—for Heaven’s—hide me!”

“What, *you*, Monsieur le Comté de Liancourt? *Another* escapade, I think?”

She smiled; but now an outcry from the wall’s top; now a thud of feet dropping into the manor-close: and he, all atremble, now thoroughly demoralised, forgot *her* peril, everything but one...

“Save me!”

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That instinct of the hen to hide under the wing rose in her...

“Into the summer-house,” she whispered with pressing breath of complicity—“through the window: while they speak to me, you escape to the garden-end—there’s a gate...”

When, in an impulse, he had dipped his lips to her forehead, and was away, she peered after him, ran a little after, anxious for him; but, as she shut the door upon him, the front few of the pursuers, running, saw the act, and panted: “We have him!”

But she, staring up at them dumb, bloodless, held her arm stretched before the door, till a butcher in his smock who seemed to be in authority, said to her, “Does the lady shield a man who curses the people’s king?”—and tore her away, to rush into the summer-house.

Lip-sounds of intolerance followed their discovery of the exit by which the quarry had escaped.

Only a few continued the now useless pursuit, the others now crowding round Mathilde, handling her with roughness.

“Let *her* be hanged, then!” was said.

And: “Another of them!”

And: “To the lanterne!”

The butcher at this point stepped to two of them, whispered something, smiling; then, smiling, hustled back the others; and, armed with firelocks snatched that day from the City Guard, he with the two stood facing the girl.

He said: “Mademoiselle has been judged by the people, and must be shot.”

She let her eyes stray in the direction of the house,

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then, recognising her remoteness from help or hope, held them to Heaven.

There was a count of one, and two, and three: and the weapons cracked out. Mathilde dropped. The crowd laughed, ran off...

But at no time, even in the height of the Revolution, did some reasonableness cease to distinguish the *canaille* from brutes: and in this case the butcher had taken care, as the others knew, to fire with blank cartridges, so that nothing but the spear of fear had pierced Mathilde. She was found there later, and borne to her bed, where she remained with “brain-fever,” till a day arrived when she opened her eyes with fresh intelligence; but then, sitting up, she looked toward some doves cooing, then keenly up toward the ceiling—round—down at the ground; and now a groan; and now: “Why, Maman, God help me, I can’t see!”

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The château of the Comté d’Auvray stood where vineyards grow thick amid groves of orange and olive, a little outside Avignon; and to this, the Arcadia of France, with its patois and *joie de vivre*, the family migrated when the fury of the Revolution began seriously to reveal itself, never dreaming that there, of all places, the Terror was to reign at its dreadfulest.

The count was old, had had a stroke of paralysis on being told of his daughter’s blindness, had not followed the emigration of the nobles: he had thus saved his estates from confiscation. And at Avignon the countess managed by a tactful diplomacy to keep the heads of the family on their shoulders—a

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feat to which the sweetness of her blind child richly contributed. So the members of the bourgeois municipality, the mayor and his spouse, and the most powerful of the “patriot” middle-class of Avignon, proud of the honour, paced on three evenings each week up the lane of olives, up the marble *perron*, to take a hand at whist or *reversi* in that seigneurial salon of the stately Comté d’Auvray.

Of these visitors the most constant was a certain Albert Duval, one of the municipals of Avignon. Though not a Provençal, he had distinguished himself by his zeal in the revolutionary reel in the neighbourhood, and had grown to be greatly feared. It was soon enough divined that he was violently in love with Mathilde; nor did the father and mother check him in this presumption as sharply as was expected of them. He was, in fact, acquiring vast powers over life in the commune, and everyone recognised that the complaisance of the great folk must be due to motives of prudence. But the blind beauty turned to his suit a smile as lifeless as her sightless eyes...

It was not till late in '91 that the fire that had been smouldering in Avignon broke into flame one Sunday.

That morning Madame d’Auvray led Mathilde through the vineyard-paths, through the town-gates, and so to the Church of the Cordeliers in the town, the countess, a stout old lady with a piquant smile and kindly eyes, bearing her breviary in her hand. But it would have been well for them if they had shunned the church that day: for the priest was in the midst of the office, the people’s heads were bent,

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when a “patriot” entered, paced up the nave, and, in bantering words, began to harangue the worshippers—chiefly women. There was a dumbness of emotions, a shriek of execration, a rush; the man was dashed to the ground, trampled, pricked with a thousand pins, and left a flaccid mass on the chancel-steps.

Madame d’Auvray, seated near the entrance, fled with Mathilde at the beginning of the émeute, got to the château, and fainted.

And three hours had not passed when a young man darted, panting, into the apartment where the family sat, crying “For Heaven’s sake——!” his face distorted with fright.

The count, a tall old man, with wide masses of white hair, said: “Tell me, Citoyen Duval, why this intrusion?”

"Hide!" cried Duval: "fly! The Brigands are on the road—to arrest you. Your lives—mine——"

"But we are guiltless of any——"

"Were seen in the church! Ah, Mademoiselle Mathilde, speak to your parents!"

But now a sounding of feet near: and two soldiers in the blue-national uniform stood in the doorway... Half an hour afterwards the family was en route to the Castle of Avignon, Albert Duval himself ordering forward the troop which escorted the prisoners.

At this time the self-styled "Brave Brigands of Avignon," under the command of "Jourdan the Headsman," were the sovereign lords of the district. Even the power of the "patriot municipality" had dwindled to a shadow; the town-walls had been

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planted with gibbets for "the suspect;" fields laid waste. Hence it was that after the corpse of the desecrator of the morning's mass had been carried through the town, brow-crowned with laurel, the emissaries of Jourdan scoured the town, making arrests to avenge the massacred "patriot These all were thrown into the dungeons of the Castle.

And now began that "Butchery of Avignon In a room of the Castle's Glaci  re Tower, which rose sheer out of the Rhone, sat Jourdan, his judgment-bar being a little table littered with brandy-bottles and tobacco-pipes, round him lounging his impromptu court-martial of patriots clad in the brown carmagnole, a tin lamp without a glass flickering luridly on the countenances of this tribunal of ghouls.

A name was called from the list, some hurried words spoken, judgment pronounced; a "brigand" at the door shouted the name; others waiting outside with swords set out to execute the sentence...

One only of the municipals was present at these orgies—"the good patriot," Albert Duval, who stood propped upon the wall with folded arms, lithe, silent.

"Citoyen d'Auvray, his wife, and daughter..."

There was not even the ordinary parley on the reading out of these names—the leprosy of these people was so evident: Jourdan, with a nod to the doorman, drank from a bottle, while Albert Duval stole briskly from the room.

The count and his household had been thrown into one of the profoundest of the dungeons, down to which the moaning of the Rhone over them never sounded, nor any ray roamed; and there they lay

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in mud, numbed, empty even of any feeling of pity for themselves, at that hour when their executioners descended toward them.

Behind those executioners stole Duval, till, on arriving at a certain circular cell, he suddenly stepped to them, saying "Come in here."

They followed him in—two giants, one swinging a lantern—and he faced them.

"Now, look you, Jean and Pierre," he said to them, "I am a municipal of Avignon."

"What of that, Citoyen?" one asked.

"This much, that the three citizens you are going to kill have not had fair trial."

"Bah! Trial enough. Come, Jean."

"Well, my friends, but, in order to reach them, it will be necessary to pass over my body"—he propped his back upon the door.

Their throats rattled a laugh; then their foreheads darkened.

"Here is another of them!" one cried: "pin him!"

"But you perceive this sword," Albert remarked.

"Nom d'un chien! have we, then, no swords...?"

A lunge, and they closed: to dart apart, again to close, and scatter skedaddling, filling the apartment with the ecstatic legs of skeletons dancing death-dance, their skipping steels sticking, seeking ingress, as necks of geese dig and ferret, this way, that way, in tierce, in quart, with botte and parry, with lock, stoccado—on the one side thews and fury, on the other coolness, science; until a trickle seen on the municipal's cheek pricked the brigands to rashness, and in that instant a dig of the rapier ripped Jean's

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hip; Pierre, fighting now for life, pierced Albert's thigh; but in the same moment the brigand's own gullet ruptured upward like a pillow, and he fell over his fellow.

Weak, reeling, Duval now made his way with the lantern to the den where the D'Auvrays had lain four days. When the key squeaked in their

lock, they looked up, thinking him their executioner come at last...

No time to lose in talk: at once he led out the blind girl, supporting the count on his other arm, while the countess followed, weeping.

"Have no fear," he whispered to Mathilde: "you will all be saved."

"But you?"

He pressed her hand, and forgot his peril and his hurts when she gently returned this caress.

They passed through a number of chambers, along darksome corridors—for Albert had made himself master of every mystery of the structure—until at last, when he had opened a small portal, they stood on steps that looked directly upon the Rhone rolling under open sky of night, and upon a boat waiting there below the steps.

And now Albert whispered to the count the names of the friends who had arranged to receive and conceal them: upon which the countess kissed and called him "son;" the count called down blessings upon his head; Mathilde was silent. He stood presently hearing theplash of their paddles, peering after, until they vanished into darkness.

But "the treachery" of Duval did not long escape the patriotic scent of the Brave Brigands of Avignon.

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The man Jean still lived to tell his tale, and Albert had hardly re-ascended to the judgment-chamber than he was charged, questioned, condemned, and flung into an *oubliette*—all in the same hour.

That he was not instantly killed was due to the shrewdness of Jourdan, who knew of his popularity, and had, moreover, just had rumours of the advance of an army under Choisi. To butcher any number of aristocrats was one thing, but a patriot municipal was another: so Albert lay in his cell fifteen days, until Choisi's army appeared, when Jourdan was seized, and his prisoners released. In that Glacière Tower over a hundred gangrened bodies were found by Choisi.

And now the Count d'Auvray crept out of his hiding-place to resume possession of his estates; and the receptions of the countess became more crowded than ever.

Duval was always there, silent, wrapped in himself, like a statue, but for the fact that he took advantage of Mathilde's blindness to pursue with his eyes her every movement, and note the shade of every emotion on her face.

Hidden from her, he fancied himself hidden from all—never imagined that his passion was the talk of all.

Meantime, the Revolution rapidly developed itself, and Duval, who had something of the faculty of a ruler of men, rose on the rising tide. When those brutal tribunals known as the “Comités Révolutionnaires” were set on foot, his reign became as absolute as that of any maharajah who ever went mad with majesty.

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Hence every consideration, not merely of gratitude, but of policy, must have seemed to the count and countess to meet in his favour; and thus one morning the countess called Mathilde into her boudoir, to stroke her brown hair, and say fondly to her: “Ah, Mathilde, I can see by your pallor and blushes that you know what I am going to say. I am commanded by your father to speak to you on the subject that is so near to all our hearts. Don’t cry—kiss me. Least of all good children, I know, will you disobey your father’s will. Tell me, isn’t it so?”

“Yes, maman,” answered Mathilde, shaken with sobs.

“And Duval is quite a noble fellow. I wish you could see how handsome and finished he is; and then—so powerful! And he worships you, you know.”

“But I do not——”

“Hush, my child! Time—time does these things. If he were to withdraw his protection from us in these awful days——”

“But is it noble of this man to have me flung to him as the reward of his protection? Oh, why could he not have left me to die in the Glaciere!”

“Ungrateful girl! But silence—here comes your father—not a word before him!”

But the bounds of Albert’s generosity had not even now been reached. He divined precisely the young lady’s mind, and, with a patience really heroic, waited, hoping to overcome her by repeating the proofs of his devotion; while she, astonished at not being at once forced to acknowledge his rights

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over her, for the first time felt a painful sense of gratitude toward him.

Even for his confirmed taciturnity she was thankful: for a word from him was seldom heard. In her heart she grew to admire him; and those

pressures of the hand after the soirée, though hardly perceptible, those upward appeals of the darkened eyes, spoke volumes to Albert. They at least understood each other.

So passed the greater part of the terrible year '93. Between such people as the D'Auvrays and the scaffold there was at present hardly a step, for to be rich was to be "suspect," to be "suspect" to perish. By the advice of Duval the count had given up the greater part of his domains in the form of "a patriotic gift;" but the "Revolutionary Courts" were seldom to be deprived of their prey by such devices, and Duval found all his craft and alacrity called into play, for as President of the Comité (Court) he must show no lack of passion—his own neck depended upon this; one after another the few nobles of the neighbourhood who had not emigrated had dragged their hapless feet up the scaffold steps; but when, three several times, the Public Prosecutor had mentioned the name of the Comté d'Auvray, three times had the guile and adroitness of Albert foiled the guillotine.

But a fearful jeopardy lay in these feats of legerdemain. Already there was a breath of a whisper about that the Citoyen Duval might not, after all, be sound to the very heart of him. And this additional question arose: What was the secret of his evident connection with *the doctors of*

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Avignon? for now to act in any way out of the common was to be suspect. His housekeeper, too, had breathed the secret that he would sit up through the hours of darkness, poring over books and charts: what, then, was the meaning of these vigils?

One day he sat at a table in the library of the Château d'Auvray with a "Commissioner" just arrived from Paris—one of those Commissioners who were sent out, singly or in pairs, with power to "take in requisition" the whole wealth of any citizen whomsoever—before the two men lying a map of the domain D'Auvray; and the Commissioner remarked, "The Château shall be used as a magazine; and the rest of the estate, corn being scarce, may be planted in wheat."

"You take the whole in requisition?" Albert asked.

"Certainly."

"There is this woodland in the corner here."

"Let that be sold."

"Would not fetch much... It contains the forester's old cottage——"

“That at least may be sold.”

“I recommend that it be left to the family as a residence.”

The envoy glanced at him.

“Are they not aristocrats of the old type?”

“Yes; but still good patriots.”

“Popular in Avignon?”

“Very.”

“And your own good friends, I suspect.”

“Well—yes.”

“Oh, very well, let them have the cottage.”

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So the next day the family took up their abode in this new home, a two-storied *cabane* in the heart of forest. But the old count, too broken now to be able, like hosts of the nobles, to take his place at the blacksmith’s anvil or carpenter’s table, was without a penny now, so that thenceforth he and his were boundlessly in the power of Duval, breaking daily the bread of his bounty.

Through the forest, with his bonnet rouge, his carmagnole, he came as usual in the gloamings, full of good hope, to share with them their lowly estate; and the elders would retire betimes, leaving him with the blind girl, they two being the best of friends now, she trusting in him, revering him, above all beings.

“Mathilde,” he said to her late one night, taking her hand, “tell me truly, have you ever loved?”

A wave of scarlet flooded her face...

“And you love—still?”

Low, with her brow bowed down, she breathed “Yes.”

“Ah! and for me no hope?”

“But I love you, Albert! How you pain me! But not—oh, no, no—you do not know!”

For a long time he stood silent; then looked up suddenly to say: “Ah, but I think I have it in my power to bring you a blessing so boundless— But, then, with it will come to you the knowledge that I am not what I seem, and it may then be—too late.”

“You speak strangely! What blessing?”

“As I always say, you are not really blind—look

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now again toward the fire: do you not see something?"

Her answer was: "Yes, I am conscious of a blotch."

"Just so—you are not blind. And now I am about to reveal to you a secret: for five years I have been studying for your sake the surgery of the eye, and I believe I can now rectify the neuropathy which that shock and sickness brought upon you. A week gone, in the presence of three certificated physicians of Avignon, I operated upon such a patient, and they are all saying that I have gained great skill and performed a miracle."

On a flood of emotion, she flung her face toward him, groped for his fingers, covered them with kisses...

And there came a day when she sat facing an open casement, and doctors stood around her, while the cruel-kind knife of Albert quivered in her eye; and the countess knelt trembling by a bedside; and the count, dumb with doubt and wonder, moved from room to room...

The light came!

One afternoon, in her impatience, she raised her bandage, and "saw men as trees walking..."

Albert Duval was then there, having come to make his adieux, before starting for Paris with (as he said) "a report to the Convention;" and, in saying goodbye, he bent and kissed her cheek. In her reception of this caress was a charming consent; the count and countess saw it, and they, too, came and kissed her as in confirmation of a tacit compact. Duval

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put up his hand over his eyes, and fumbled away hurriedly, trembling.

After this Mathilde rapidly recovered her sight, and, crazy with the ecstasy of a new sense, used to walk out every day along the paths of the forest—frolicsome, laughing!

One twilight—the sun had well set—she suddenly spied in an alley a man coming toward her, and, overcome with astonishment, she let out that species of little shriek into which women can cram the expression of ten parades; then stood in stone, pale to the lips.

Gaston de Liancourt! It was he!—the scape-grace, whom, live years gone, she had rescued from the Paris mob, he wearing still the aristocrat dress of those Café de Foy days, the old coat, frogged and laced, ragged, draggled; and, with the old repose of manner, the old gay gallantry, he stepped and took her hand.

“Gaston de Liancourt!” she cried, the light of delight raying from her face; “it is long since we met!”

“You believed me eaten by le Père Guillotine?”

“Not I! I knew that you were alive!”

“How did you?”

“My! shouldn’t I have—felt? Sometimes I have known you so near, that I could nearly hear you speak! But you did not write to me!”

“Yes, twice, after that—mob affair.”

Her fingers touched her bosom: the two letters were safely there.

“Just twice”—with an underlook—“and the rhapsodies and vows were not taken to be over-sincere!”

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“They *were*, however; and the vows have been kept.”

“So? Kept really? But my maid, who read them to me, was little winded by the effort!”

“Yes, I heard of the blindness. It made me—may I say it now?—fonder of you than ever.”

“*Gaston de Liancourt!*” Her face, to conceal its inflamedness, fell upon his sleeve...

And again and again they met in this way, beneath the stars, the cigale screaming to the intense breathings of their secret. The time drew nigh, came, went by, when Albert Duval was to come back and claim his bride.

And so it happened that one morning the distracted Count and Countess d’Auvray sought in vain through house and forest for Mathilde. Mathilde had taken wing. Nor was it until mid-day, when almost crazy, that they came upon this note in an escritoire:

“My darling Maman,—I am going from you full of pity for you! But I know that, however insane I seem, my dear maman will never, never believe me undutiful of heart! The power of a love stronger than a thousand wills—pity me still, and forgive! You know him well; before long you shall be told his name. He has friends across the frontier whom he says we may hope to reach. As for you, Albert Duval will not abandon you now, for I know him to be noble. What is in my heart cannot be told—I will say no more. For a time, farewell!”

The Count d’Auvray, on reading these phrases through the stains of tears that stained them, raised his arm to call down a malison on his darling; but

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in the same moment a messenger entered with a letter. When the old man had torn it open, he saw that it was from Albert Duval:

“My dear Comté d’Auvray,—It is now five years since I avowed to you my love for your daughter; it is four since, when you moved to Avignon, I followed you. Forgive me if I remind you why—it was to protect you and her. How I have done this you know. I won office, wealth; many times, often in ways not divined by you, I saved your lives; nor can you realise what all this long hypocrisy in a cause I abominated cost me. But, like Jacob labouring many years for Rachel, I thought it nothing, if only I could change the hard heart of your daughter.

“Four months ago, after all this labour of love, she confessed to me that her woman’s affections were settled on another.

“I then abandoned hope; and, resolving to sacrifice myself, I brought back light to her eyes, never intending that she should see my face, since I had every reason to believe that, on seeing me, her feelings of friendship for me would immediately turn to enmity or aversion.

“Presently after the operation I therefore pretended to depart for Paris. In reality, I lingered still near her, gloating upon her window at midnight, hoping for one goodbye glimpse of her robe among the brushwood. I had just cast off with loathing the trappings of the Revolution to resume the old apparel of my order; and my last evening hereabouts had come, when Mathilde, at a turn of the alley through the firs, came suddenly upon me, and

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with her new eyes spied my face. Ah, I noticed the little opening of her arms—her little scream! and in an instant my heart knew all. I was loved, my father!

“And yet not I, Albert Duval, but I—Gaston de Liancourt!

“Five years ago, when I swore to you to gain her by the annihilation of my old self, when even the old name was doffed with the rest of the old being, you consented to the deception, believing that in the complete burying of my once self lay my only hope of winning her; but could either of us conceive that all this time her wayward heart would be wearing itself out with sighs, not for the honest town-councillor who crowned her life with bounties, but for the profligate and scoundrel whose cowardice had robbed her of sight?

“But you may conceive my anxiety to keep my two personalities apart, for the present at least, in the mind of my Mathilde. My motto at present is: ‘A bas Albert Duval! Vive Gaston de Liancourt!’ So you will not refuse to pardon us our flight, for if you know lovers’ minds, you will know this to have been my wisest plan.

“Our separation from you will not be long, for I will soon come to resume the mummery of bonnet rouge and tricolour, and to live with you until the ill days are ended.”

This letter, with others connected with this narrative, is now in an old cabinet of the Château d’Auvray: for under the Directory the count’s estates were restored to him; and there the family, with Gaston de Liancourt and Mathilde, continued

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to live. It is a great-grandson of Mathilde who is the present owner of Château d’Auvray, the greatest of the ancient seats near Avignon.

* * * *

When this tale had been told, “Oh, the charming tale, Mons, le Comté de Pichegrue-Picard!” cried out Lady Sartory, Joy’s aunt, through the noise of clapping, which was dominated by Tom Bates’ dogged clapping, as dogged, fanatic, dogmatic, as the *claque* in foreign theatres. Fragson himself clapped a little; and he said “It would be good, if it was true.”

“But it is true!” cried out Lady Sartory: “aren’t the documents there in the cabinet...? It *really* happened!”

“Pardon me, Ma’am, it did nothing of the kind” —from Fragson: “if anyone ever went blind through fright, that kind of blindness would not be curable by the knife. But Mathilde only went blind because someone among us, whose sympathies it is desirable to touch, chances to be blind. And, however blind, would she not have recognised the voice of the man of her heart during those years of association? A tale must have no weak point, every fact stated must have a recognisable truth: or it is not worth the telling.”

“A truth, not necessarily a recognisable truth, I think”—this from Mr. Bernaby Gilbert, the “airman.” “Every truth is not recognisable by everybody;

most truths are not recognisable by anybody... I take it that Mathilde went blind, not through fright, but through an illness brought on by shock, which illness may have been such, that its effect, the blindness, could be cured by the knife. As to recognising the loved-one's voice, she states that she sometimes heard it when she heard Duval... Who can say? which of us, but one, can decide? For only the blind know the blind."

"And the intuitive," put in Mons. Pascal, the novelist.

"Ah, the intuitive," Mr. Gilbert said: "but the intuitive won't quite wash clothes with an engineer like me. That's just the difference between the crafts of a mechanic and of an artist: the mechanic is subject to sterner tests. He says 'Now, how shall I manage this job?' and the very Hand of God is in it; the very Voice of God, ladies and gentlemen, pronounces sentence on his thoughts, leaves no doubt as to their truth or untruth. If he thought rightly, no man may recognise it, but Heaven knows; he has been in harmony with the stars; ten thousand dumb tongues shout of him 'well done'. If he thought wrongly, it is with him somewhat as with me, if I think wrongly two seconds in my pastime of flying: the Divine sentence is—death. Hence I place Stradivarius on a higher level than Paganini: for though the violinist, too, of course, is a craftsman, as every sort of artist is—the man of *letters*, or *literature*, too—though the violinist has hands, ears, not less finely educated than the violin-maker's, yet his departures from truth are not shown up with exposure so sure, clamorous, and rhadamanthine.

As for the teller of tales, his truth or untruth is still more dubious than the violinist's. Generally, he is not a craftsman, *i.e.* not an artist, at all, and as to what he says, by what test shall he be judged? One critic thinks him a ninny, another a great creator. The public, untrained in mentation, think with every wind. If told to think him a ninny and a great creator, they mix, and think him both. Or if, against suggestion, they come to a decision of their own, they may be depended upon to select for then-favourites the female nonentity and the male bore most incapable of such a thing as a truth. There is a lack of test... Shakespeare is at present recognised as about the truest, but I assure you that an engineer, schooled in truth, finds in this writer, as in all ancient and most modern writers, a hotchpotch of falsities—

on each page the footprint of the child, the savage, frank as the track of the pterodactyl in Triassic sands... Our estimates want overhauling: we despise the high, prize the low—that's bad. A mechanic who is a fool cannot hear his ears for the thousand shouts ‘thou fool!’ with which the universe hounds him; but a tale-teller may be as world-famed as Mr. Fragson here, and be the greatest fool—meaning by ‘fool’ a mind, like, say, the writer Tolstoy’s, indifferent to ascertained facts, denying what he dislikes, addicted to his fancies and vanities... I don’t know, ladies and gentlemen, if I seem to be talking sense...”

“*To me* you do,” Joy hastily said, who seldom joined in a discussion.

“And to me!”—from Fragson.

“But——!” Joy’s Aunt Anne began to say, for

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when Fragson agreed with anything, Joy’s Aunt Anne disagreed.

However, before more could be said, the violinist Krasinski, who had been got to Castle Lanchester for two days from Paris, bowed himself with his Amati down into the bower, and now commenced some famous fiddling, to Miss Clode’s accompaniment.

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CHAPTER IV

M R. BERNABY GILBERT had an unfavourable day for the telling of his tale, the mind of everyone was so fluttered with the presence and violin of Krasinski; moreover, after the fête of the day and the ball of the night before, some were naturally relaxed. Not Gilbert himself, however: for in the afternoon in the arbour when his hour came, it found him sitting in his characteristic way, bent forward, one leg before the other, as one ready to spring at something; and he proceeded to give a tale that he named

NO. 16, BROOK STREET.

I make no pretence, ladies, of being a tale-teller, but will relate an incident in the history of a friend of my own in the hope of a little entertaining you all, our hostesses in especial...

Aubrey handed back to Hylda the letter from Canada which meant their separation; and he muttered “When people part, they don’t meet again in a hurry! Something intervenes. This comes of my own odious indolence.”

“Dear, you have worked,” Hylda answered: “don’t blame yourself.”

They were walking round and round the Inner Circle of Regent’s Park, wind-swept and white with

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winter that morning; and there were despondent silences between them.

For a year they had been ever on the jump of being married; but Aubrey Watt’s £70 of income were always spent in advance; his works had not stirred the world; and things had failed to happen.

It was ambition that had been wrong with them —“by that sin fell the angels.” Hylda, when not attending to her ailing mother, Mrs. Hetley—a naval captain’s widow—had drawn ladies in the top of the fashion; but her attempt to “evolve a type of her own,” to depict ladies without wee peeping feet, and a sweep of limp slimness, and retroussé noses, had not been appreciated: her straight noses had turned-up the art-editor’s.

Aubrey had been even younger! From Post-impressionism he had verted to the Quattrocentisti when two feet of wall in the *Salon* had been allotted to an imitation of Giotto by him; and this craze of his appeared even in his

few magazine-illustrations. His “Vision of St. Paul”—a seven-months’ work—slavishly reproduced that “angel’s-flesh” of Fra Angelica; but in trying to found a school at twenty-four, he had found himself up against things-as-they-are, like one trying to stop a goods-train with the wind waved from a perfumed handkerchief. The Strand dealers had muttered that they were not taking any.

Meantime, Mrs. Hetley’s ailing had cost money; and now had come the Canadian letter from a sister, offering a home out there...

Aubrey muttered: “If I could raise only £50, that would stop the rot.”

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Hylda answered with an expression of fondness in her broad, pretty face, which she turned up to Aubrey’s—that face of Aubrey’s being worth a girl’s gaze, those eyes, soft, girl-killing, that dash of moustache which just shadowed the upper lip, the greenish felt of that old hat, so shabby, carefully careless, exquisitely selected out of the worldful of hats, crying aloud of Latin Quarter suppers, and Mimi and Chichie.

“But it is impossible that I cannot invent £50!” he said suddenly: “I will somehow, I’ll—borrow it.”

“Who’ll do the lending?” Hylda wished to know.

“Anyone—*Bostock!* My cousin Bostock in the City.”

“Dear, they only lend half-crowns in the City,” Hylda mournfully mentioned.

“But a cousin... No one would think that I have relatives in business! There’s my uncle Peter Irish in Australia—Crœsus is his name! And I wrote him months ago to tell him to send some money——”

Hylda laughed up fondly into his face, always infatuated with his personality and habits of acting, however artless, since artist-like; and she said: “Oh, Aubrey, he has never even seen you! An uncle at the Antipodes is such a distant relative——”

“Well, perhaps it was cheeky. But what is the use of people in business —? At least he might have answered! He has written to me occasionally before... Well, there only remains my ‘Kermesse’: I’ll work like a nigger to finish it—that’s sure to sell—and, meantime, I’ll try my *Bostock*.”

Hylda, glancing at her wrist-watch, said: “Come and tell me the result: you are good at humorous

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description. Oh, I must hurry home They turned their steps toward the ground-floor in Maida Vale which was the Hetley home.

Then, while resolve was strong in him, Aubrey got on a 'bus for the City; and presently was stooping into the underground den in Great St. Helen's, where his cousin, Robert Bostock, made money.

Bostock was a long-faced individual of forty, dark and lank, with hard lines about the mouth—a grave, slow man, with City in his bones; a man who in his play-hours was a chapel trustee.

"What, you?" says he, getting up slowly from his desk: "It is some time since we met. I have meant to communicate with you, but you are such a bird of passage; one is never sure if your address is Nürnberg, Paris, or Chelsea. Be seated."

Aubrey sat under one of the gas flames that brawled all day down there over Bostock's bent head; and presently, with lids that veiled his eyes, he got to the statement: "Not altogether a motiveless visit, Bostock; in fact, you have to lend me some money."

Bostock took it without emotion: his austere face might have been a pear-wood carving. Always deliberate in answering, he mediated upon Aubrey before he asked: "What is the figure?"

Aubrey thought of 100, 50, 80, and came out with: "I want seventy-five pounds."

Whereat Bostock's eyes fell; and he said: "Well, we are cousins—two sisters' sons—alone in the world, we two, eh? Not one relative but each other"—he Uttered this untruth with marked emphasis—"and though we are told 'neither a borrower nor a lender

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be'—those are the Bard of Avon's words—still, I only wish that the state of business permitted me to oblige you on this occasion. What on earth do you want seventy-five pounds for?"

"Question of furniture, and changing my address;" then, with a little laugh, "question of getting married."

Bostock looked at him with commiseration. "Gracious! Married? I thought that marriage had gone out of fashion ever since 'Punch' said 'Don't!'? And you must have noticed that we are told in the Holy Book that gold was created before woman—which is to show us that we should have nothing to do with woman until we have got hold of gold."

His mouth-wrinkles widened in a smile, while Aubrey let slip a breath of laughter, his lids lowered in an expression half shy, half disdainful—a little thing which was part of his manner. His Cousin Bostock was not pretty in his eyes; and, divining that no insistence was going to draw £75 from Bostock, he did not ask twice, but stood up.

“On some future occasion, let us hope!” called Bostock after him.

“Thanks!”—Aubrey was gone.

Not twenty minutes afterwards another visitor was stooping down into Bostock’s office, a rough-bearded man, rough-clad in woollens, bronze-coloured, with “colonial” stamped all over him—a man whom Bostock received with marked deference; and they were soon seated head-to-head in the inner office, like plotters.

The man had momentous news...

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“The gov’nor’s got the youngster’s address at last,” he almost whispered—to Bostock’s agitation, who breathed: “Got the address? How, Sweeney, my friend?”

“Pans out this road, look,” says Sweeney, breathing to the ceiling a streaming cone of smoke that scented the den with an aroma like roses’: “about four months ago the governor wrote to the youngster, who was lodging in Chelsea then, telling the youngster he’d be coming on a visit to England before long. But the featherhead either never troubled to read his uncle’s letter, or forgot all about what was in it, or never got it: for pretty soon afterwards he wrote to the guv’nor from an address in Maida Vale, telling the gov’nor to send him some money. Well, the gov’nor was on the sea, coming over, by the time this letter got to Sydney, see? But now it’s followed him—came to hand this morning: youngster’s found.”

Bostock eyed his grate sidelong with a grave underlook...

He had had the hope that Aubrey might be undiscoverable during all the period of his uncle’s visit, feeling that “the youngster,” once seen, might be likely to kidnap an uncle’s fancy; and he regretted now that he had not lent the £75 “to change Aubrey’s address,” for then Aubrey might again have been hard to find... He asked: “When is Uncle Peter likely to write to the young man?”

“Gov’nor’s going to *see* him—this forenoon,” Sweeney answered—“incog, you twig? Just to spy out the land.”

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This so irritated Bostock, that he jerked his poker clattering from him in sulky resentment, looking daggers at the grate.

"Where's the good getting into a pelter?" says Sweeney, serenely breathing upward his streams of Cuban smoke: "fat's in the fire, any road."

"True"—Bostock turned upon him with a bow: "resignation becomes us."

Sweeney vented half a laugh upward.

"After all, there is no reason to despond," Bostock suddenly said, stooping forward, tenderly brushing cigar-ash from Sweeney's grey shirt: "there remains on my side—you—my uncle's right-hand, his mentor, his conscience; and you are sure that if *I* inherit, *you* will reap. What you have to do is to instil unceasingly into Uncle Peter's ear the character of young Aubrey Watt, his flighty life, heedless, unconsecrated, the contrast between such an existence and mine——"

"Bah!" went Sweeney: "that's no price, any road, all that bullsquitter. Gov'nor's after a steady business-man like yourself, look, to hand over his stuff to, not that daubing featherhead; and likely he will, if you handle him the right road. But you ain't down to the sort of cove the gov'nor is at all, if you reckon that all that pap's going down with him... Well, here's off. See you again." He got up to swagger out.

By this time Aubrey was at his flat—high up in a warren of flats not far from Hylda—a flat of three pigmy rooms, where everything was Bohemian, yet elect; and he at once set industriously to work on his "Kermesse" down in the studio at the end of the

hall-passage—a packed little apartment that had a smell of mastic.

He had palette and mahlstick in hand when his trembler-bell rattled; and since his "laundress" (as he called his charwoman) was gone, he hurried to the door, expecting to see some one of the troop of students who infested him.

But it was an elderly man—tall, with a stoop—in a frock-coat, but on his head, instead of a top-hat proper to the coat, was a broad "full-share" hat; his face hard-baked, clean-shaven; his eyes deep-blue, deep-set, piercing, overlooking; and Aubrey's heart started at the thought: "Some outlandish millionaire. Heard of me. Art-patron. Come to buy

"You Mr. Aubrey Watt?" he was asked.

"Yes, I'm—— To whom have I the——?"

“Name of England.”

“Quite so. Come in, Mr.——”

The stranger entered with roaming eyes, noting the poverty of the land; and when Aubrey, convinced that it was pictures that were wanted, had led him into the studio, he took a seat by the little fire.

Some observations were made as to English weather, Aubrey at the easel giving little touches—a question in him as to whether he had not seen the stranger’s face in some region previously.

And since the stranger was in no haste to state his business, Aubrey was presently struck by the coolness of this individual, suddenly there in his studio, quite at home, saying nothing, with wandering eyes that took stock of everything. The painter painted to fill a stillness that began to be embarrassing.

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Suddenly, though, the visitor decided to say something, to mutter languidly: “That’s not a bit o’ good.”

Aubrey’s lids lowered in their half-shy, half-disdainful way, while his lips let slip a breath of laughter—his manners rather distinguished—a touch of cosmopolitanism, of the French marquis—though this was all lost upon “Mr. England,” who, getting no answer, presently remarked again: “That’s no price any road.”

Here was no “buyer”! and, if not a buyer, then, a creditor—some emissary of the Trade Protection Society, sent at the instance of last year’s milkman? At this second assault, Aubrey again vented laughter, half turning his eyes superciliously to ask: “What’s no price any road?”

“That daubing,” from the visitor; “throw that to the dickens. When I was eighteen I was on the stage three months, but I got precious little meat out of it.”

No reply was vouchsafed to this bit of autobiography; but after a silence Aubrey asked: “May one ask why you’ve come?”

“Ay; to do you a service. Have heard of you; know you’re hard up; and, as a City friend of mine has a clerkship open, said I’d offer it you. Small post, but fine prospects.”

Now, the notion of being “in the City,” like old Bostock, was novel to Aubrey, and trickled in a ripple of merriment down his ribs. At a loss for adequate answer, he discovered his cigarette-case, and turned upon “Mr.

England," saying "Have a cigarette!"—as one suggests medicine to the ailing.

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But this rather seemed to nettle than to soothe, for the visitor answered with some aggressiveness: "I don't smoke, sir. No, nor I don't drink."

"No?" went Aubrey. "That's right—shun drink."

"But you snigger at every mortal thing!" cried Mr. England. "Why do you? Where's the joke? I offer you this post—take it or leave it, as you like."

"I leave it," Aubrey gravely remarked.

"Oh, you do? You leave it? That's short and sweet. You see, it isn't work you want. You deliberately prefer to spend your life in poverty, idly daubing here—you seem to be one of those fly-by-nights and pitch-by-days
_____"

A little flush of resentment now touched Aubrey's forehead.

"And you," he muttered, "seem to be a distinctly unamiable old gentleman."

The words were heard, and, with an undertook of reproach, the old man said: "Oh, I do? You say that to me? 'A distinctly unamiable old gentleman'?... Better mind your P's and Q's!"

"And you had better mind your H's."

"Mind my what?"

"Your L M Nts."

"What are you talking about?"

Aubrey vented laughter, but then pouted, and definitely said: "By the way, I have engagements. I'm sorry I cannot ask you to spend the day."

"Meaning that you turn me out?"—from the old man, half rising, with surprise in his eyes.

Aubrey, with lowered lids, stood silent.

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And suddenly the vistor lifted his voice: "Then, suffer poverty, sir!"

"Oh, you go," muttered Aubrey to himself, reaching aside to throw open the studio door.

"Mr. England" clapped on his ample hat, with a nod of menace passed out, and no more was said until Aubrey, following, had opened the flat door, when the visitor stopped, seemed to reflect, and remarked': "Stop—I

think I'll make you another offer. You're a painter; so, if you like, come and make me a portrait of my house in Brook Street, and I'll give you a price for it. How's that?"

"A portrait of your..."

"Yes—what's the snigger for now? I say a portrait of my house—take it or leave it!"

"I leave it."

"But what's the matter with him?" demanded "Mr. England" of heaven, lingering, loth to go. "Don't the youngster want money?"

"I think you will find some sublimer mind than mine to make you a portrait of your house in Brook Street, Mr. England," Aubrey admonished, sore at his scorned masterpieces in the studio.

"Then, starve, sir!" cries the old man with a flush.

Aubrey began to shut the door slowly, shutting the other out.

"You see, you turn me out!" cried the visitor, going reluctantly with the door: "you can't deny it! You turn me——"

The door closed; Aubrey was alone...

An hour later, in Brook Street, Sweeney was putting a dressing-gown on Mr. Peter Irish, to whom

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Sweeney was valet, chancellor, cook, courier, and other things, while from Mr. Irish came a steady muttering of invective: "The sniffing snob! Doesn't want to become a business-man—turns up his nose at work! At the last, not wanting the lad to be hard up, I even offered to let him draw me the house—made game of it—sniggers at every mortal thing under heaven."

"Did he that?"—from Sweeney—"he must be a softie."

"Handsome chap, though—tall, soft-eyed—remarkably like my sister Margaret that's dead—thinks no small bones of himself, with his lahdedah ways and fallals."

"Ay, I know the kind of cove," the prime minister remarked: "that kind of cove is no price, Gov'nor, for your money; you're after a substantial man, like the other cove, Bostock."

Silence': till Mr. Irish, struck with fresh surprise, suddenly cried: "Turned me right out of his place!"

"Whah! did he that, the featherhead?"—with one eye shut down; "well, he must be—! I'd make no more matter about him, Gov'nor, if I was you."

Reclining now in a large armchair, Mr. Irish gazed up at the ceiling-moulding, and his next words were: "Handsome chap, though—poverty struck, but dressed up to the nines in his own style—has a way with him—low-voiced—my sister Margaret's self. See him once again—just once..."

It was in consequence of this decision that, three days later, Aubrey received from Bostock an invitation to dinner, "at six precisely: upon which

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Aubrey pelted over to Hylda in high spirits, to say: "Bostock has relented, and intends to be 'a lender'! See here. If you can put off the taking of the tickets three days——"

Hylda, less effervescent and sanguine in temperament, said: "It is a risk, of course, but I'll try."

And it was done. But it was not lending that was in Bostock's mind: his invitation was by instruction from his uncle, who was to come at eight to see Aubrey, and Bostock had mentioned "six precisely" with a motive reprehensible in so estimable a member of society. In fact, the very mammon of avarice was active in Bostock in those day, as is proved by the fact that, that evening of the dinner, he stopped in Kingsway on his way from his office to his Gower Street flat, and there bought from a stores half-a-pound of absolute alcohol—after a protest against the sixpence charged for the bottle!

He knew that his uncle was Vice-President of the Council of the Victoria Total Abstinence Society, and he muttered sullen exonerations of himself to Satan as he poured absolute alcohol into wine-decanters that night. Then, with angry eyes, as if someone had wronged him, he went to dress...

The dinner went well. Aubrey, who imagined himself a *connoisseur* in wines, praised Bostock's, sitting "dressed," correct, telling anecdotes of the Boule Miche across a bowl of winter chrysanthemums, while silver and polished glass glanced in the glamour of the lampshade's moonshine, two men from Paginni's attending, mute-footed. But no offer of a loan from Bostock!

Aubrey expected it after the turbot; a thought,

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like a vapour, occurred in him at the punch Romaine, "He has not yet offered;" but when the *bombe* was served he no longer cared.

Half of half a pound of absolute alcohol will turn into a Turner sunset the brain of any disciple of Giotto at twenty-four; hence, at seven-thirty Aubrey wanted to go home.

But Bostock would not let him. He said: "Wait—one more libation to Bacchus: someone's coming to meet you;" and only when his bell actually rang at eight did he say to Aubrey: "Very good! Go, go—perhaps it is best."

Hence Aubrey and Mr. Irish met in the hall; and Bostock presented them:

"Mr. England—Mr. Watt."

"Hallo!" the pre-Raphaelite hilariously cried, penetrated with the conviction that somewhere he had beheld that frockcoat: "aren't you my old friend what's-his-name? Where the devil did you get that hat?" and while the old man coughed from a clap on the back, Aubrey was gone.

"I am sorry that it was impossible to keep him, as arranged," Bostock said: "he is hardly quite himself to-night, I fear."

"*Faugh!*" went Mr. Irish...

And "*Faugh!*" he went again a little later to Sweeney in Brook Street; "stinks of whiskey!"

"Does he that?" Sweeney asked, standing aghast.

"Drunk as a fish!"

"Well, I'm blimied!"

Mr. Irish was stepping petulantly about, as if looking for something, with muttering lips... "Done now—no more—give him up—give him up.

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'Where the devil says he, 'did you get that hat?' I *think* he said 'hat'—tongue thick; drunk as a fish.'

"Well, I had a notion that that was the kind of wild brumby-colt the cove was," Sweeney said, handing the governor a glass of egg-nog, "but I didn't reckon it up he'd actually give way to drink that road. Well, this clinches it, Gov'nor. The other cove, Bostock's, the cove for you."

Mr. Irish went fretful an instant. "Bostock? Yes, all right in his way—solid man—level head. But all Number-one with him. Not an Irish—no generous blood: takes after the father—after the father... Marvellously like my sister Margaret, Watt! Handsome chap—handsome ways—even when in liquor. Larky devil! Sniggering, stuck-up spark. 'Where the devil', says he, 'did you get that hat?' I feel sure he said 'hat'!"—something like a giggle now mingling with the egg-nog guttling within the millionaire's

neck, and when he deposited the glass it was with a bang of decision, saying: "Give him one other chance, Sweeney, just one. See if there's any good in him. I know how I'll work it: you wait."

But waiting was not permitted to the Hetleys; their tickets were taken the next day by Aubrey, and it was a case now of Londonderry-to-Montreal for two sad hearts. Even yet, however, a desperate hope was in Aubrey: and four days before Christmas he trudged himself footsore—shunning 'busfares—half expecting sudden riches from his 'Kermesse' now finished. Such lucks have happened to poor artists—in Paris!

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But London was callous to him; and, getting into bed that night, he thought: "Always hard-up at Christmas! Good heavens! Better turn futurist, and paint in complementary colours."

Then, when half-asleep, a thought made him sit up—an auction-sale of the whole blooming lot to the private dealer, Brussels-fashion, as they stood in the studio!—a hot thought that set him busy three days organising the thing.

But London's reception of it rather chilled. Hylda herself failed to hide her lack of high expectation.

"Pity to sacrifice them, Aubrey!" she muttered. "How much, dear, do you expect from such a project?"

Aubrey, full of it, thought in hundreds.

She kissed his hand, sighing: "Hope's always the highest bidder!"

However, he wrote, trudged, got some promises, and, about nine in the night, walked home tired, but not despondent, facing with turned-up jacket-collar a wind which swept down the Edgware Road, shedding snow upon pavements which were processions of people trooping in a Yuletide mood, the shop-windows all illumined, showy; but he could not even buy Hylda's mamma a little present.

"Always *sans la galette* (hard-up) at Christmas!" he thought in *Argot*.

Up in Maida Vale he turned to the left for his flat, and, as he approached it, noticed the figure of a ragged man cringing close to the house-door; but he did not see the man near, deciding to cross the road and drink a glass of beer at the corner public-house.

However, he had not long been in there, standing

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at the “private” bar, when the man came in and stood there, too—did not order anything, just stood; and Aubrey thought that his eyes had never rested on so wretched a wreck.

The man’s toes showed through scraps of boot secured with string, his shins showed through, his left arm was indelicately naked, collar turned up over his burrowing nose, his eyes glaring hungrily through rags of grey hair under the rags of a hat.

Nothing was said. There stood the shivering peep-show of wretchedness. Aubrey sipped beer. And several minutes went by.

Then came a barmaid to ask: “What’s it you want?”

The outcast bent toward her with the husky whisper: “It’s so cold! I haven’t a penny——”

“Here, get out of it!” she said with intolerance.

But here Aubrey interposed.

“Hard up?” he asked.

“As you see, sir.”

“You might give him a glass of beer for me”—to the girl.

The pauper bent toward Aubrey’s ear to whisper: “Thank you. Can I have ginger-beer instead? The ginger warms.”

Aubrey gave the order: ginger-beer was brought; and they stood sipping together.

Presently the tatterdemalion again brought his lips toward Aubrey’s ear to whisper: “Are you an artist?”

“Yes, I paint.”

“I thought as much. I am an artist, too.”

“Ah! We are *confrères*.”

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The object of sorrow thrust his hand into the labyrinth of his rags, drew out a little panel, and handed it to Aubrey, saying: “Here’s some of my work.”

As Aubrey looked at it, his cheeks puffed out in a spasm of laughter... It seemed to be the painting of a house—but such a house!—with waving walls, lop-sided windows. At the bottom were painted the words, “16, Brook Street.”

As Aubrey handed it back, a trembling voice asked him: “What do you think of it?”

Seeing the old fellow's eyes fixed beseechingly on him, he answered: "It is all right. A painting depends upon the eye which sees it."

"All, you don't think much of it, I see... That's because my hand's shaky now, I can't paint any longer. But I've got a little grandchild, hungry"—now he brought his lips to Aubrey's ear to whisper in his husky way: "Buy it of me!"

Aubrey smiled. "But—you bring coals to Newcastle!"

"True, I see that"—the outcast's eyes were on the ground—"but to save a fellow-artist. Oh, to be destitute and desolate in old age—perhaps a young gentleman like you can't imagine what that is... and my little girl hungry!" Now again he brought his mouth to Aubrey's ear, and now there rang something of passion, of authority, in his voice: "*Buy it of me!*"

Aubrey's forehead wrinkled. "I happen to be fearfully and wonderfully hard up myself..."

The old man, hanging in suspense upon him with a greedy gaze, made no answer.

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Then suddenly Aubrey: "How much do you want for it?"

"Anything—anything!"

Aubrey drew some silver from his pocket... "I seem to possess six and thruppence," he said. "Suppose I give you three bob? But to-morrow I am having a sale, and, if you come about noon—43, in Devonshire House over there—I may give you a leg-up."

The bag of rags grabbed the "three bob," threw "16, Brook Street" to Aubrey, and, without a syllable, took to his heels; stopped, however, at the door, and doubled back to toss at Aubrey, with two passionate nods: "Good egg! Good egg!" and was gone again. The doors swung behind his flight.

Aubrey looked at "Brook Street," tittered, took it home as a curio, and threw it upon the studio mantelpiece, whither he went to lay out the pictures for the sale—an hour's dusty work before going to bed.

But in the morning only five out of nine expected men turned up, and at their mere faces the pre-Raphaelite's dream began to fade. They strolled dully from picture to picture, and no psalm of rapture rose from them. One asked Aubrey in an aside if there would be anything to drink. Another muttered counsel: "Why not go in for decorative work? Easel-pictures by small men are no go these days."

Two of them had not even the look of dealers' men—upstanding gallants with a swagger, and grey shirts, suggesting The Bush and back-of-beyond country; and, though they did not seem to know

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each other, they might have been mistaken for twins. And there was no bidding. One man said: "I'll give three pounds for this;" and another, "Two for that." But Aubrey did not record these offers in his ready notebook.

Three pounds for the "Vision"! The frame had cost him five; and every offer was a slap in the face.

In the midst of which one of the two swaggerers, having swaggered to the mantelpiece, bent with sudden interest to study "Brook Street," and then, nudging Aubrey, asked him: "This your own work?"

Aubrey's little outcry of laughter rang merry enough to the ear, yet he felt it really.

"No," he said, "not my own."

"Ah, I thought not," the other muttered: "slightly different style."

The painter turned off to attend to an offer of four pounds for his immense "Kermesse," and was about to answer "I think you jest," when the other swaggerer touched him to ask: "That little thing for sale?"—nodding toward "Brook Street."

Aubrey was becoming nettled inwardly, saw no joke in this, and answered shortly: "Anything you like."

"What is it? A Turner by chance?" the fellow wished to know.

"No—same school as Turner," Aubrey answered with some bitterness, "but not a Turner."

"I see."

Five minutes later Aubrey decided to end it. These were not the men to keep Hylda in England. And

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he said: "All right, men, we won't bother. Your offers can't be considered serious."

"Pity you gave us the trouble to come," one said with a sour mouth.

"I'm sorry," said Aubrey; and a stroll toward the door began.

But now one of the swaggerers touched Aubrey's arm, saying: "Don't care if I give you five pounds for that."

Instantly from the other, prompt as thunder, rang the cry: “Give you ten pounds!”

“For *that*? For ‘Brook Street’?” Aubrey asked.

“Give you twenty!”

“Give you forty!”

The other three stood still, casting glances of astonishment, almost of alarm, at one another, at Aubrey astare, and at the pair of bidders who seemed bitten on a sudden to some strange rage.

“Eighty pounds!”

“Hundred and sixty!”

They confronted each other with obstinate nods in the corners of their foreheads, with decisive cries, a light in their eyes. Within one half a minute the bidding was up at five hundred pounds.

“But it is only a child’s daub!” Aubrey cried out to them.

“Give you a thousand!”

“Give you two!”

Some hoax?... Or was it some curious, furious delusion that impelled these men? Aubrey gave up trying to guess. There the phenomenon was before his eyes, and a spring of joy, which apprehension kept from springing, had shot up in him at a vision

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of himself and Hylda tramping, married, through Provence in the Spring.

“Five thousand!”

His eyes narrowly examined the men’s faces—not a smile, a hint of mockery, there. But what had he done for this? To have tossed to a poor man three shillings out of six—was that by thousands of more value than his imposing “Vision of St. Paul,” and all his daubs?

“Ten thousand!”

With that lowering of the lids, half shy, half disdainful, Aubrey let out a breath of laughter. But his head was a little bent; humility hit him. And now he was aware that the bidding was done; in a species of dream he heard himself cynically asking “No advance?” amid laughter; then was aware of someone picking notes from a gross, greasy thing of leather—thousand-pound notes—and counting them into his hand; then of his hand being heartily shaken. And now he was alone, and “Brook Street” gone.

In a thrice he was flying—hatless—down to go to Hylda...

It was now near noon, and there, ten yards from his house-door, as he darted out, he saw the bag of rags, the painter of "Brook Street," come by last night's appointment for "a leg-up."

Without stopping, Aubrey swooped upon him, and, dragging the old steps faster than they could go, whooped: "Come along! We're millionaires for ever!"

And now he was banging at the Hetley door, now was dragging the old man into the dining-room; and he ran out to find Hylda.

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But when, within five minutes, he came back, chattering with Hylda, the dining-room, to their astonishment, was empty.

At once, however, they caught sight of something written in pencil on a blotting-pad on the table, and they bent together over the words:

"I am cold to my bones, and can't bother any more. Come with your sweetheart to eat your Christmas dinner with your Uncle Peter at 16, Brook Street, whose portrait you were too stuck-up to paint.—Yours, with love,

"A distinctly unamiable old gentleman."

Aubrey and Hylda straightened themselves to look into each other's eyes...

"He is in England—your Uncle Peter—it was *he*..."

"But this is one-act comedietta!" Aubrey cried, scratching his wrinkled forehead.

Then they burst out laughing together.

* * * *

When this tale had been told "Well, now, the nice, nice, tale, Mr. Gilbert!" Joy's Aunt Anne called out through chatter and the ardent *claque* of the sailor-boy and others, while Joy's face was upturned toward her aunt with the smile of a sphinx that hides what it thinks, as when dead men smile.

"Splendid, I call it! S-s-splendid!" Tom Bates cried out, as pleased as Punch.

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"Oh, you, you call everything splendid," Joy said under her voice, her shoe-point kicking him a little, even as she received from a maid's hand a mess of rose-jam and cream, and listened with one ear to Mons. Jules Pascal, the novelist, who was saying in English to Fragson on the well "It is French, and also Greek, in spirit, this tale of Brook Street, yet related by an Englishman, so is very possibly the narrative of an actuality."

To which Fragson answered "Actualities, my dear Pascal, are chapters and paragraphs in a grand romance, never complete stories in themselves. Where, therefore, you have completeness, you have fiction."

"Not necessarily, I think," answered Pascal, a tall Parisian type, with a blonde oblong of beard, and too-strong eyes—"for in the endless variety of events there may occur chapters complete in themselves. About the most perfect tale which I have heard—the most perfectly expressed, with the most admirable brevity, and that suppressed rapture of the masters—is the English tale, 'Dickory, dickory, dock, a mouse ran up a clock, the clock struck one, the mouse ran down again, dickory, dickory, dock': and here you have history, yet the *finis* of fiction... But what a tale! How more-ingenious in plot than our Brook Street. And how told!—with that sphinx-dumbness of the Jehovist, of Job, and Homer, not half an adjective within a kilomètre of it. No mention as to whether it was a grandfather's clock—yet it tells; not a syllable about the clock's silent spite and waiting to strike, nor about the mouse's emotion at that bump of doom and row of reverberations

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now braying on a sudden—yet it tells. Yes, that's poetry, that's the Writer's style. I think, though, that it should have been 'tickory': the D, good in 'thud', 'thunder', seems less good in presenting, partly the patter of the *pattes*, partly the ticking."

"Yet what is it all about?" asked Fragson, "this poetry, painting, 'Art'? Let me hear you say whether it is a fact that the thing serves some purpose."

"You have a listener," Pascal whispered: "ask *her*"—pointing toward Joy, who, with a listening ear, was eating rose-jam and cream, her left fingertips, shell-pink, touching and touching the mess with daintiness; and cries Fragson to her "What is 'art' for, Miss Joy?"

Joy laughed in answering "To rescue from the Great Dragon, Mr. Fragson."

"Who is——?"

“Dullness!”

“And is that a great achievement?”

“To be dull is to be blind and blasphemous, I think,” was answered, “since the universe is a wonder, and deserves an emotion. And since the most seeing and reverent people may sometimes be dull, I consider art a useful thing, to seduce men from that blasphemy by moving in them emotions. But I should not use your word ‘great’ as regards art, or any artist—so far: for the trait of Mind is consciousness, which is the power to see facts, so that *greatness* of mind consists in seeing facts not yet seen by others—in designing the dynamo; but artists see only one old fact—that the universe is a

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wonder, and deserves an emotion; and when their vision of this is fresh and moving, that makes them more useful than the great, but does not make them great, since greatness has nothing to do with usefulness, but only with seeing. Though, for what I know, art and artists may yet become great in some future age.”

“Bravo! I agree,” Mons. Pascal cried out.

But Fragson said: “My own expectation is the opposite. I imagine that art is a symptom of one stage of evolution, like waging war, or ‘crawling’, chasing reindeer, or bringing down birds with a stone; when men become less dull, the necessity to prick them by any tickling of their senses into seeing that the universe is a wonder, will become less and less, and ‘art’ will pass away, or get relegated to the lower races, who will do it better than the higher, since the higher will have advanced beyond -the stage to which art belongs, as children ‘crawl’ and fancy better than men can. Already the Japanese are the best painters; two of the best French novelists, two of the best English musicians, were of negro blood—a tremendous average, considering the meagre number of negroes in Europe. In America their art-production is repressed by their mental subjection: yet they commence to excel there on the stage, in music, poetry—not in science _____”

But now Krasinski bowed himself down into the arbour with his Amati, his Bergonzi, and at his coming every tongue was dumb.

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CHAPTER V

THE next afternoon the task of telling fell to Mons. Pascal, the novelist: and said Miss Clode to an English Miss Garry, in descending the steps to the grotto, “See if he doesn’t sprinkle salt on his tale, and give us something sex-problematical. Heaven of its grace make all us girls‘ good bearers’—as Shakespeare says.”

“If the man is Pascalesque, I’ll rise and protest my innocence,” declared Miss Garry.

“That isn’t going to stop Mons. Pascal, though,” Miss Clode answered: “*il sait tout*, and is cognizant of your guilt...”

That day a lot of hot bonbons were brought into the grotto before the narrative began, to be the cause of lots of laughter and buffo fun; and it was wobbling a hot bonbon about a babbling tongue that sucked-in breath that Pascal began, pretending to be boy-like, buffoon and irresponsible in a Parisian way, though his nose was paler. He sat on the well, and, knowing English by heart, spoke in English, as he told

THE TALE OF ONE IN TWO.

“I am ill; I am sick...”

This, muttered in that Genoese dialetto which Corsicans talk, was uttered on a balcony overlooking a garden illuminated with moon-lanterns—in the Champs Elysees: and the speaker, who thought himself

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alone, started when an answer came out of the balcony-palms: “Try a change, Count: all that would wear out a horse”—‘all that’ meaning the series of rooms behind the balcony, reeling now to the music of “La Boudeuse”—a revel insolently demi-mondaine, carnality asparkle in diamond and light, an imitation of heaven in Milton’s hell: the Satan of all which was the “sick” Count Fiorenzo, the crowned King of Paris that year.

“Mr. Stanley!” Fiorenzo exclaimed.

Stanley sauntered to the balcony-rail, repeating his advice as to “a change” with a familiarity not usual in the satellites of Count Orazio Fiorenzo, who was a man of “a fierce countenance,” a being who even in

the reel of his revels could not divest himself of a majesty that seemed to command humanity: “Do not touch!”

But to the English he was indulgent as to unknown quantities—foreigners to Europe, oddities from Jupiter.

“Change!” he said: “but where, sir? I have no means of reaching the moon.”

“If a man is world-weary,” Stanley answered, “let him go to England.”

“England I know well”—with Fiorenzo’s disdain of eye, downward-looking, sideward-looking.

“You know Bond Street—have been on England, not in it. After all that, an English home would be as new to you as any moon, a new heart to you, a bath in dew. I’ll take you, if you like.”

The Count with that sideward coldness of his eyes answered: “I respect your intention, Monsieur.” And the subject dropped.

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But the big Englishman and he lingered still on the balcony, looking together like cow and calf—though, small as was the count, he had that look of weightiness of Napoleon, which caused Paris to call him “The Little General.” In those perfect curves of his face, too, in his elegant little legs, in the thunder-cloud of his brown brow, he resembled his “great” countryman (whom he disdained as a clown), but most of all he resembled Napoleon in that vehemence of temperament which made his phrases sound like explosions, which prevented him from being able to write, since either the nib cracked to fragments under that grip of his wrist, or his letter looked like a furrowed field, a series of trails of ink meant for words.

Stanley admired his mind, liked the man: had observed the jaundice showing under the skin of his swart jaws, the world-indigestion that was working in his inwards; and though nothing more was then said of the “change,” a month later, at just such another *bal masqué* at the count’s *hôtel*, the count himself mentioned the matter. Stanley, consenting to take it in hand, suggested—a bicycle. The count smiled disdain. Stanley insisted that everything on the trip must be as he willed; and the next day a *professeur de bicyclette* came to the *hôtel*. The count, in learning to ride in his grounds, finding a certain malice in the front-wheel, flew into two furies, and kicked into a chaos the stays of two bicycles; but on the third day could ride. And, having got to London by train, the pair set off thence

on bicycles for Devonshire, the count still indignant at and accusing his vehicle of ill-will.

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However, he quickly began to prove the connection between pedalling and health; and the experience grew ever more agreeable, till they reached the pretty retreat of Manor Farm, the property of a Mrs. Langler, a widow, whom Stanley numbered among his friends.

On the night of their arrival the count, in retiring for the night, whispered to Stanley as a momentous thing discovered: "*Their refinement is exquisite!*"—for with his hands behind his back he had stepped to examine the water-colours on the walls of that old drawing-room, where, too, stood a precious etching or two; his eye had taken in every detail of the dainty lair, Venetian vases, Chelsea china, hollyhocks, two old statuettes, and then the garden, as puritan, as guardedly gay, as chastely English, as Mrs. Langler herself. Then, after the supper, Miss Natalia Langler had sung "Sally in our Alley" to her sister's accompaniment on the spinet—yet a new experience in the sweetly simple for Fiorenzo: for two lovely girls, Natalia and Rosalind, infused Mrs. Langler's home with something of the perfume and trip of Spring.

Though twins, they were little alike: Natalia dark-haired, rather tall, a haughty throat, her face stained like snow flushed with sunrise; as for Rosalind, she was the chubbiest bud.

The visit was to have lasted three days; but after a week Fiorenzo and Stanley were still there, the count showing no inclination to be away. He escorted the ladies on their walks through the Autumn lanes, and in the gloaming's afterglow, under the ghost of the harvest-moon, saw the foot

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of Ruth roving the fields, to glean the ears of corn, and garner the stalks in her arms. His tongue, meantime, was loosed, and he spoke of the gilt world he knew—while a misgiving grew in Stanley's mind.

In the evenings, as Fiorenzo listened to the ditties of the ladies, to Natalia's fiddle, Stanley could see how the man of the world—whose notions of Woman had been mostly drawn from Corsican mountain-girls and the "stars" of the "Folies"—how he was revelling in the freshness of this impression.

Stanley proposed departure. Orazio Fiorenzo refused. Stanley insisted.

"I shall go," he said.

"In which case," Fiorenzo replied, "nothing is so certain as that you go alone."

Then all at once a discovery terrified Stanley: he believed that he could detect in those virgin eyes of both the girls the very abandonment of love for Orazio Fiorenzo.

And one night, after he was in bed, Fiorenzo walked into his room, stood at his bed's foot, leaning over the bed-rail—a moonbeam revealing his extreme paleness, the fire that inflamed his eyes: and there was a silence which Stanley, sitting up, staring, dreaded to break.

"I love them!" Fiorenzo suddenly hissed in confidence.

Stanley reddened in wrath; yet the trill in the count's voice, the trembling bed-rail, left no doubt of his sincerity.

"But *which* of them, in God's name?"

"Which? Natalia, I say."

It sounded doubtful—"I say"!

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However, the very next day things assumed a fairer look: the count demanded in marriage the hand of Natalia. And two months later, having duly led his dark-haired darling to the village-altar, he was off with her into the world... After which, from widely divergent spots of the earth—from Delhi, from Joppa—her mother heard from her; till finally she took up her residence in the mountain-home of the count's race. But her promises to revisit England she did not fulfil.

During two years Stanley received several illegible letters from Fiorenzo, and from Natalia two, in both of which he could detect some note of melancholy... And then once more, at the end of those years, Count Orazio Fiorenzo appeared before him in his London house.

A glance told Stanley of change in the count... his eyes, no longer cold in their sideward still disdain, roamed hungrily; his fingers digged in spasms into the palm of his hand.

"But the countess?"—from Stanley.

"Is dead."

"Dead"?

"I say it."

Stanley shuddered.

The same hour Fiorenzo, Stanley with him, proceeded to the farm, where the news of the countess' death had preceded them by letter; Fiorenzo had sent, too, a lock of her hair, some little mementoes: so the old home, when they entered it a second time, was a home of mourning.

Well, Stanley presently went back to London, leaving the count behind, not without a feeling of

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unease... An unease not groundless: for five months later he received a letter begging him to go back to the farm on a matter of some delicacy.

Now, Stanley, a man of the world, was neither nervous nor squeamish: yet, for some reason, he now felt impelled to protest most gravely against the marriage of Orazio Fiorenzo with the fair Rosie—a bond in which some boding told him of something ominous; and ardently he implored the poor mother, now heart-broken and bereft, to interpose her will. She, too, felt as he felt; but dared not, she said, coerce the headlong inclination of the girl.

Stanley accordingly accompanied Rosie to Paris, and one moody day in December, within that gloomy edifice of St. Sépulcre, gave her into the custody of her grim groom.

From her—a nature more intimate and sunny than Natalia's—the letters to Stanley came more frequently, dated from various capitals, and then steadily from Venice: and in them also he thought that he found some tone of heart-sickness. But this, if it existed at all, must have been short-lived: for, on her taking up her residence at the Villa Fiorenzo in the Corsican fastnesses, her letters became suddenly merry and plentiful. Rosie, it was now clear, was happy. In one was a chuckling history of the one visit which trenched upon her solitude—by the podestà and staff-general of Bastia; in another an account of the peculiarities of a proud old clown who acted as butler! Every trifle was a bright event for her; and many sentences said something as to "her dear lord." Suddenly the letters ceased...

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Letter in the explosive tone of Orazio Fiorenzo written to Stanley from the Villa Fiorenzo:

"My friend, this document may never reach you. I write it, however, by way of monument to my own integrity, careless of its fate.

“My friend, that hateful being, Pope Clement VII, pronounced in 1525 a curse against the sons of my race, in the fulfilment of which it has been a tradition among my fathers to believe: and the malediction has at last hit. With me my race ends. I write this as a protest against—and a defiance of—a fate unmerited.

“You cannot doubt that I loved—you could not be so lunatic. But soon after realizing my passion I was confronted by a problem: to solve which I made a plunge into darkness, and married the Countess Natalia.

“I expected happiness. Happiness was far from me. The poor lady, at sight of my bitter disappointment, pined. The splendour of her beauty dimmed. After a time I refused to look at her; to see her increased my fever. Something hunted me, something burned me. I traversed two continents; I consulted doctors: they took me to be intoxicated—rabid with the rancour of the tarantula. My malady took only surer root; I was Tantalus; a passion as furious, yet as pure, as the frenzy of the seraphim consumed me.

“When my agonies had reached the intolerable degree, I got from my lady, who greatly loved, and also feared me, an oath to hold no communication with her acquaintances for three years; and though on her knees she implored me to pity her mother,

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her sister, who would suppose her dead, by this time my will had got, in her eyes, something of the dignity of law; moreover, I won her with specious reasons connected with secret politics, and plots of the Mafia, that helped her to yield. Then, leaving her in the mountains, desperately I announced her death, found myself once more in Britain: I wedded the Countess Rosalind.

“The word ‘bigamy’, may be, arises in your mind? My friend, it is immaterial. I, too, at the time, was troubled by this word. That second marriage I now know to have been the most sacred, just, and essential, that was ever contracted.

“And now at least, my friend, I expected peace, and *again* the mawkish after-taste of the carouser filled my mouth. I felt, it is true, some ease from my fever; but my Rosalind, seeing me still unrestful, grew so sad, that sometimes I found her in tears. We passed from city to city, until we settled at my palazzo on the Canal Grande.

“The problem, you see, was still unsolved: I loved—but whom? Hardly Natalia, that had been proved; hardly Rosalind, that was being proved. The

discovery to come was foreshadowed by the alacrity which flushed me whenever I left Venice to visit Corsica, or Corsica to visit Venice; but months passed before, in a boat on the Canalazzo one night, I uttered a cry, flooded with light.

“The next day I started for Corsica...

“My friend, there is a wing of the Villa Fiorenzo cut off from communication with the rest of it, save by a gallery and a single door—a wing used in other centuries by ladies of my race as a place of penitence

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and retreat. These erring souls were careful, however, that their hermitage should be spacious and well furnished; the walled garden at the end gave them a place of pleasance; a kitchen and staff consoled them for an over-devotion to their rosaries. It was not without strain and pain that I now introduced the Countess Natalia into this place—not without a struggle did my will subdue her proud soul! ‘Am I, then, a prisoner in a Corsican fortress?’ she once asked. Aye, a prisoner, I replied, a prisoner to her prisoner. Seeing me groan and grovel, she had pity. An aged servitor of my father, sworn to secrecy, a captive with her, attended her; the other menials, save two, I dismissed; then I was away for Venice. I returned to Corsica with Rosalind.

“A step bold! but necessary. For of the actual nature of my passion I was now aware. I did not, I have said, love the countesses severally, but—here was the tremendous secret of my destiny—I loved them conjointly. I write, you think, of a fantasy? You know nothing! If you know nothing of the *modus operandi* of atomic cohesion, of the welding of metals, how will you comprehend the mysteries of the spirit? Which of the halves would you love, were your wife divided by a thunderbolt? So I, too, adored an entity, not the portions which composed it. The woman I adored was the woman who would have been born, had the birth of which Natalia and Rosalind were the products been single and not double. It happened to be double; but it had become clear to me that when the two countesses stood shoulder to shoulder the woman I loved *was there*: they, in respect of me, completing each other. It

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was One—a mystic One, a dual One, if you like, not two—who was my wife.

“And as the copper and the zinc, which asunder are spiritless, together produce electricity, so the rapture which the sisters were capable of producing upon me depended upon their juxtaposition. So it had been in the first instance at the farm, where the impression wrought upon me was an impression wrought, not by each, but by both: and it was this impression which had caused me *to love*. It was therefore essential to me that they should live within the same building, that I should step straight from the goddess elegance of the one to the graciousness and gaiety of the other.

“This I accomplished. And now began for me, for them, an existence of—bliss. No longer could either question the genuineness of my passion. My fever vanished. Each revelled in my fresh tenderness. They loved! Some of the letters written to you by the Countess Rosalind at this time I saw: did they not tell of a heaven? The Countess Natalia, too, forgot her repinings, the gloom of her reclusion, in the opulence of my fondness. Only some shade of anger might cross me anon, if Rosalind would go back to the forbidden subject of the death of Natalia, begging me to tell of her deathbed. Otherwise all was halcyon. I spent by the side of my Natalia those portions of the day during which my Rosalind supposed me in my study; and though my captivating captive still gently chid me for concealing the reasons which had led me to keep her from going forth, she seemed to grow reconciled, and in her regal eye shone only the light of love and peace.

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“My friend, one day in this calm heaven the darkness of storm arose.

“I saw my Rosalind standing one night—in the part of the castle remotest from her apartments!—before the bolted door, *listening*. God! I stood thunderstruck. So, then, she *knew, knew*, that there was something—something dark, forbidden—behind those bolts and bars!

“This thing unloosed once more within me the ogre of gloom. I grew suspicious—turned myself into an eye to spy. Suppose, I whispered to my soul, *suppose*—? The idea dimmed my sight.

“And my moodiness fell upon them both: Natalia became haughtily aloof, once more thorny, carping: Rosalind museful, pensive. She ceased to write to you. The laughter died out. I tracked shadows in the dark with the cheetah’s paw; I probed to the bottom the creak of a board at midnight. I could no longer doubt that suspicions filled the mind of Natalia. One day, overcoming her fear of my censure, weeping on my shoulder, the gentle

Rosalind boldly questioned me as to what terrible thing I hid from her '*in the west wing*'. Great God! I silenced her with a rebuke.

"But the situation was all too tempting for the forbearance of the Parcæ: for here were all the elements of a disaster, needing just the touch of destiny, the match to the mine, to flash all our lives into ashes. And it came, when it came, with the suddenness of thunder.

"For in the silence of night I knew that a foot flew past my study-door: and, crouching, I prowled—could just descry a figure, a blacker patch of black

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—until a moonbeam streaming in revealed a loose robe. Rage convulsed me. Rosalind, I thought—Rosalind *again*—spying by night! for she took the way to her own bed-chamber, of old occupied by her sister. But when, on reaching it, she pushed open the door, lamplight streamed out upon her, and I saw—by the powers of hell—the proud throat—not Rosalind!—the ponderous cataract of black-brown locks—Natalia! And in that room was Rosalind! I darted forward: but only in time to see them for one wild moment staring crazily into each other's eyes, then from both their throats a shriek which must have reached down to Breccia, and they were strained to each other's breast.

"My first instinct was to plunge a sword into the old servant to whose treachery this must have been due; and I rushed toward the west wing, pausing but to take a *pugnale* from the armoury. The door I found secured as usual; so that the countess had escaped through the garden gate, the key of which was in the guardianship of the aged peasant. I passed inward to find him, there was light here, and I remarked lying on a priedieu an ivory tablet on which was written 'I have heard a sound of singing: try, if you are sad, to escape to me in the east wing'—in Italian, Rosalind's writing! With renewed fury I flew from room to room to find my faithless retainer; but he had fled, as his two fellow-servants, too, dreading my frenzy, have fled.

"I then went back to the chamber of the encounter, where the ladies, hand in hand, rose to confront me. In the mild eye and the eye of pride alike I read my fate—resistance to my will, to very

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death. I know their mother—her bland but adamant resolution in matters where the so-called 'religious' motive rules. And as she, so they. I did not

doubt that I could as soon turn the sun to snow as move them from their purpose of rebellion.

“We have no avenger remarked the stately Countess Natalia, ‘but with our own hand we shall guard ourselves from outrage’—she raised a dagger.

“To your own apartments, Madame la Comtesse Natalia’, I said to her.

“Nor had my voice yet lost its authority: with a rigid face, struggling to disobey, she let go her sister’s hand, and obeyed.

“So ended our heaven. What life was now possible for any of us? With a goblet of wine I first waited upon my first-wedded, who declined to accept it from my hand, but nodded to me to deposit it upon her altar-step; and I then waited with a goblet upon the Countess Rosalind, who took it, gazing broodingly under her eyelids upon my face with her blue upbraiding eye; and to both I said: ‘At two—at the first stroke of the clock—I, too, begin to drink. We drink together’.

“Since then I have been writing, my friend, this vindication of myself, which I shall leave here on my study-table. Already some grey of the growing day mingles, I see, with the night: for it now wants five minutes only to two o’clock. Without me, within me, all is soundless. The draught of wine is at my side. Immediately we three shall pledge each other, and sleep in peace. Adieu.”

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About ten minutes before those last phrases were

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written the Countess Rosalind had sped across the breadth of the Castle, her “goblet” in her grasp, to the Countess Natalia’s apartments; and, having deposited the “goblet”—a silver cup standing in a *zarf*—on the altar-step beside her sister’s, she sat on the step, her forehead on her sister’s shoulder, while the Countess Natalia stared steadily at the *dalles* of the nave before her; and a sound of woe anon sobbed out of the breast of the Countess Rosalind.

“It is *my* fault...”

Staring at the *dalles*, Natalia made no answer. The ticking of the clock at the cappella ardente’s west end could be detected, but the shimmer of six candles blinking before the pyx was too local to show that the clock told sixteen minutes to two.

Without lifting her face from her sister’s shoulder, the Countess Rosalind sobbed again: “It is *my* fault... I knew that it was unholy to marry

him... I dreamt one night that you were alive... But nothing could stop me. There is no need for all the three to drink it. It is I who am the outsider."

"Brute that he is," muttered the lips of the Countess Natalia: "we will all drink it."

"Nataly, he could not help it: I tempted him."

"He could. I am glad that he should die."

"Now, Nat, don't be grim, Nataly. He couldn't help it, Nataly."

"Brute! We'll all drink it."

"Oh, but *why*? You are his wife: I am the outsider."

"You are going to have a child—closer to him than I am. If either of us live, let it be you. Neither

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can live with dignity—we are both degraded by him. But you live. He and I will drink it."

"Oh, I, too, in that case!"

It was five minutes to two—the moment when in the study the count ended his letter to Stanley; and the reredos glasses at the altar-back glowed a little in greens and gores at a glimmering of the dawn of the summer solstice.

"At the stroke of two he will begin to drink," the Countess Rosalind whispered.

"And I also," the Countess Natalia said: "but you live."

"If *you* die with him, *I* die with him."

"There is Mama. She already thinks me dead: if you die, it will kill her. No, you live. He and I will drink it."

"God, Nataly, it is three minutes to two"—the Countess Rosalind glanced at a timepiece at her wrist; at the same time the Countess Natalia raised her cup of doom, smelled its odour of brucine, and trembled at the tomb.

There was now a silence; till from the Countess Rosalind arose a mutter: "Yes, there is Mama."

And again a stillness of the grave reigned a little; until under the colourlessness of the Countess Rosalind's skin a flush of rose rushed and perished, as her throat, like a broken instrument, croaked sneakishly at her sister's ear: "Nataly—for Mama—I don't mind: if *you* will, *I* will—I don't mind."

"Live?"

“Yes.”

“And he?”

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“He, too. Nataly, you know that we could not live without him. I—Nataly—make you the offer.”

The Countess Natalia blushed, at the same time hiding a smile... “What would Mama think...?” she muttered.

Breathlessly, pressingly, Rosalind said: “It is so in other countries—look at the Patriarchs—it is only in England, in modern times—people should be reasonable, after all—to die when one is young—think of the Patriarchs—show me your face—O! thank God, it is yes! O! Nataly! O! I was so frightened! O! hold me! It is too much, I shall faint, O!”

At the reaction and too-sudden sense of rescue from the grave, the gale of Rosalind’s pants pervaded the chapel’s vacancy with echoes, as she lay half-afaint in the arms of Natalia, in whose eyes rioted a bright light, as she muttered with a chuckle: “We shall be nicely damned for this, the pair of us, my Rosie; but, then, as you say——”

She was stopped by a sound—the grumble of the ramshackle guts of the clock gathering like the pelting steps of the kettledrum’s rush toward the crash of its stroke: and at the surprise of that rumble the feet of both the ladies were suddenly in the fleetest flight, racing each other wildly through the dwelling, toward Fiorenzo’s study. There at his casement, as they broke in, stood the count, the bowl of brucine raised to his mouth: but it fell, spilled, at his feet; and now he was on his knees, his face buried.

On either side of him the two countesses knelt, comforting him.

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* * * *

When this tale had been told, not a soul said anything for several seconds, till on a sudden the palms of Fragson and Tom Bates together began to clap, Fragson crying out “At last! a true story!”

Some of the ladies, however, were glancing into one another’s eyes to find out what was there, while Lady Sartory (“Aunt Anne”) heaved up her hands to breathe for her neighbour’s benefit “Ah, the moral collapse of those two girls!”

This Fragson heard; and, turning upon her, said “Who says that there was any moral collapse?”

“I—I—say so, Mr. Fragson:” and now the buzz that had broken out hushed somewhat round these two champions.

“I, on the contrary, see that there was a victory,” Fragson said, “since you have a victory whenever reason kicks away the hearsays and credulities of Pete and Susie.”

Agitatedly, with a sort of laugh, Lady Sartory said: “I take my stand on the law of Moses!”

“I see. Although Moses could not fly? Ask Mr. Gilbert.”

“What in the world has flying to do with it?”—staring about her—“neither could Aaron fly, for that matter. But Elijah was a flyer; and Moses could do more—could lift a stick and split a sea!”

“Yes, but he couldn’t fly like Elijah and Mr. Gilbert,” Fragson answered, “or he would have found it easier to fly over the sea than split it. So

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he could do the harder, but not the easier. Do you believe that he did either?”

“Decidedly! since it says so.”

Fragson looked down upon her with his satyr cynicism, saying “Not really believe, I think—look into yourself. If you do really, then, it is rather ghastly for us two to be gossiping together like this, for we aren’t contemporaries, we are talking across the grave, I am alive, and you long dead.”

“Oh, that’s an assumption”—with a pout—“it may be you who are dead.”

“True, I forgot that,” Fragson admitted: “it may be the tenth century that’s alive, and the twentieth that’s dead. Still, Moses couldn’t fly: so our nuts can do things that his could not; and since *we* cannot split a sea, doesn’t it strike you that here is the difference between ancient and modern, that ancient men dreamt enormous miracles all day long, and modern men do little ones, as children play at being generals and lads *are* really soldiers. Which is the greater, to dream of summoning genii by touching Solomon’s ring, or to touch a button and summon a bunch of candles? really to fly the Channel, or to dream of lifting a stick over the Atlantic and shouting ‘*Split!*’ and, by jingo, it splits? And is it proper that lads should ‘take their stand’ upon the law of children?”

“Mr. Fragson——”

“No, tell me.”

“Tell you *what?* I say that, like other ordinary mortals, I take my stand
_____”

“Oh, then, do it, do it. But you know that Moses had two wives,
precisely like Count Fiorenzo? True,

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they were not twins, for one was white and the other black. Still, they were two, and the Lord approved, for when two persons spoke against it the Lord got angry and struck them with leprosy. Now, suppose you get struck with leprosy for talking against Count Fiorenzo’s wives? What will you say? Tell me.”

This caused Lady Sartory to cough a little and to pale with exasperation; she said nothing, and Fragson continued: “But, as the law of Moses states that the chief of sins is to be a sculptor, since that makes God jealous——”

“Oh, nonsense”—with a flush—“it doesn’t mean that at all: anyone can see——”

“But if I assure you, Lady Sartory, that it means just what it says? and that you only think it doesn’t because you hope it doesn’t, and because the best brains of that age were so babyish, groping at random in that gloaming, like a child’s eyes learning the distances, sights, lights, of the world, that such intellects have ceased to be *conceivable* to even feeble modern intellects: so that a feeble modern intellect which is resolved to read them for other reasons than enjoyment of their quaintness and poetry, sees itself compelled to read into them meanings which such people never dreamt of. Now, tell me, do you ‘take your stand’——?”

“Mr. Fragson——”

“You have to answer me, Lady Sartory.”

“I will *not* be forced to answer such—nonsense,” Joy’s Aunt Anne retorted, dropping her voice at “nonsense,” with a pout; “I say that no human being can fail to see that those two girls collapsed. I don’t know why you drag in Moses——”

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“It was *you*, Ma’am, who dragged in Moses; and some human beings *can* fail to see—fourteen hundred millions of us out of fifteen would fail to

see it, would see on the contrary that, by reasoning a little, the girls acted socially in saving three healthy lives. Ask a Brahmin——”

“Brahmin indeed,” Lady Sartory muttered: “what do Brahmins know about Devonshire? These were two English girls——”

“No, Ma’am, that’s not so,” Fragson answered: “there are deeper truths in the story than you seem to see. The girls had ceased to be English—mentally, morally. Perhaps you don’t know how quickly one does cease to be English when you enlarge his atmosphere, the social tone of Simla or Hong Kong being not only non-English, but *unEnglish*. England is an island; and we English must needs suffer the disadvantages which, as Darwin noted at the Galapagos Islands, mark all island flora and fauna: they become ‘variations from type’. Hence a certain oddity which the English and Japanese have for the rest of men: they are really a little what stock-breeders call ‘monstrous’—like the bull-dog, Shetland pony, Jap spaniel. It won’t last now that there is flight, and meantime we easily slough-off the island tone in new environments, or under new impulses—as the Japanese, too, have shown. And this is what had happened to these ladies, or they would have acted more according to English oddity, less according to common, or human, sense.”

“But——!” said Aunt Anne, and there would have stuck confounded, but that the handsome young viscount, Lord Ivor Hardinge, well-known as a

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yachtsman, stepped forward to say to Fragson “That may be true, but it was to an English girl, to a ‘variation’, that this tale was told, and it caused her to blush.”

“How do you know?”—from Fragson.

“I saw it!”

“Dear me, I didn’t notice. But let us say that it caused her to blush, to be somehow moved. Now, ask her what art is for, and she’ll tell you that it is to rescue from dulness, to induce a sense that the universe is a wonder, and deserves an emotion——”

“Oh, not emotions of shame, sir!”

“But is shame an incident of the universe, or not? If you give her snuff with an art-intention, and she sneezes, that’s good art——”

“How can it be *good* art, if it does no good?”

“It gives an emotion! Rescues from blasphemy!—that’s the good, if any. It is awfully difficult to feel shame in the abstract, and if your lordship is so much a ‘variation’ that my friend Pascal can somehow make you, bless him. Don’t you understand?—the unparalleled folly, the grand sorrow, is to be *blasé* a moment—that’s blasphemy—to feel ‘full of days’, to feel that there’s not much in the scheme of things, after all, and God needn’t have bothered —that’s blasphemy, that’s folly, while the morning stars sing together, and all the lords of God are shouting for joy: and therein lies the value, the *sole* value (so far) of art and snuff, religions and switchbacks—ask Miss Joy——”

“My good fellow——” Lord Ivor Hardinge began to say, but now Joy, her eyes downcast, with a coy

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slyness chuckled in her shoulder, saying “Pray, pray, don’t mind about me,” and that ended it: for at the same time maids were handing about flowers-of-tea, decocted in milk without any water, *à la Chinoise*: and this became the point.

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CHAPTER VI

THE forenoon after this being breezy and bright, the whole house-party went out for a cruise in Viscount Hardinge's schooner-yacht, which lay in the harbour, the sailor-boy carrying Joy aboard in his arms, causing her, on the rush and top of a flush, to call out "Oh, Tom, how strong you are!"

They luncheoned aboard; got back to the Castle before three o'clock; and afterwards began to stroll down in groups to the grotto, where some sat contemplating that sea which had just been imbuing their beings with its mood and winds, while others gathered round Mdlle. Cazalès, who was enacting a scene from *Polyeucte* on the stilts of the eighteenth century. Then before tea, when all had gathered, Viscount Hardinge, whose day it was to relate, reclined long-legged in a chaise-longue with that lordly languor which Frenchwomen eye with liking in Englishmen, and, fingering a little a supercilious eyebrow, began

THE TALE OF CHARLEY AND BARBARA.

Balcarry Maze is truly a trap for the unwary foot—not merely because the maze is a maze, but also because the avenue of limes, called "Lover's Walk," which leads to the maze from the Hall balcony, is

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mixed up with a good deal of thicket and long-grass, as is the maze-entrance itself: so that one may easily find oneself captured in the maze—especially at night, and if one's head is full of other things than mazes.

This happened to Mons, le Due de Perrin-Guérin soon after midnight that night of Miss Barbara Barrington's birthday-ball (her twenty-fifth birthday): for, though the duke knew of the maze, he was off his guard, seeing that he had just been offering to Miss Barrington his distinguished hand in vain, and was preoccupied and cross.

Suddenly his grace awoke to the fact that he was in the maze, as when one is in serious trouble, and finds oneself, in addition, being bitten by a flea; and, letting slip an irritated little outcry of laughter, he span about...

Now he put his wits to work, one eye peering small and shrewd: thrust a finger toward east, meditating upon east; then toward west; decided; and set off on his tour of the world of circles—a large blonde Frenchman of forty, with an “imperial,” a cropped head of bristles, smiling eyes.

But the maze proves wittier than the duke; is like a quicksand to him—the more he struggles, the deeper he is in; ever more concentric curves of boxwood intern him, a cosmos of box mocks him; and at last he stops to ask of Heaven with a laugh and high-shrugged shoulders: “But what sin have I committed? Am I, then, incarcerated?”

“I say, is that you, Claude?” a voice called from the centre of the maze.

“But yes! Is that you, Charley, my friend? You

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also, then, are in it?” called back the Due de Perrin-Guérin.

“Yes, and so is Stickney!” the other voice sang out: “we believe it to be a lady’s nasty trick! I’ll hold up my arm, Moses-fashion, and you try to steer your way in by it to us.”

The “Charley” who spoke was rather a giant, and, as a moon was overhead, Perrin-Guérin could, here or there, see the held-up fist, as he steered his feet in and out and round toward it; and presently he arrived at the centre, to find the two others there on iron chairs.

As his white waistcoat presented itself at the opening, Stickney, a little Yankee, all nerves and millions, burst out laughing, as did Perrin-Guérin: but Charley Ambridge was in no laughing mood.

“But this is droll, my friends,” the duke exclaimed in his staccato English, “that we find ourselves united here!”

“It isn’t a chance,” Charley Ambridge decreed, sweeping his hand down his brown beard of the sea-kings: “Stickney and I agree that she has done it purposely——”

“But no!”—from the duke—“she did not lead me, at least, by the hand into the maze!”

“No, but she led Stickney, and then me, and now you, presumably, to that south balcony, and dismissed us there, with the probability that we’d step down the avenue into the maze. I’d bet that that was in her mind. Injury added to insult. She first gets a man into her net, then puts him into her maze—sort of modern Madame de Nesle. See if I don’t give her tit-for-tat some day!”

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"And what, my friend, was her response to your offer?" the duke asked Charley Ambridge.

"Oh, I dunno—the cynical minx. Says she: 'Don't you think, Mr. Ambridge, that marriage is the death of singleness—of purpose? and should be celebrated with the burial service?'"

"And her response to you, Peter, my friend?" queried Perrin-Guérin.

Stickney scratched his raised eyebrow, saying: "Guess she wasn't very definite, anyhow. Said she has a great love and admiration for the United States, but thinks less highly of the state of unitedness. What she say to you, Claudie?"

"To me her response was as follows"—the duke made a grimace—"that she has a high opinion, from the eugenic standpoint, of the marriage of an Englishman with a Frenchwoman, but thinks less highly of the marriage of a Frenchman with an Englishwoman."

At which Charley Ambridge gave out one of his big guffaws...

They three had long been intimate—a man-of-the-world intimacy, perhaps, untouched by any emotion of genuine friendship; but they had yachted to Paraguay together, climbed the Alps together, had the habit of association; and, on the discovery that all the three were after the same star, they had become like brothers who are "at law" with one another. Each had betted fifty pounds on his own luck—they being the kind of men to whom betting is second nature; and they had made an amicable arrangement to overwhelm the soul of the lady with three offers in swift succession in one night, with the design

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to beat down by the repeated blows her well-known rebellion against man. Hence, perhaps, they were now there in prison, for it is not impossible that Miss Barbara Barrington, whose eyes were quick at seeing, may have seen something funny in this flood of husbands...

They sat dejected and silent a little, hearing strains of music floating out faintly from the Hall; until Stickney remarked: "Girl doesn't want marriage—that's about the size of it."

"Oh, nonsense, she does, and shall," Charley Ambridge answered in his masterful manner, throwing off a perfunctory puff of smoke.

"Well, that's how I pan it out"—from Stickney—"doesn't want; kicks at it. Else she would have had this one all right."

"Or rather, perhaps, *this* one, if I may say so?" suggested Mons. le Due: "a conclusion which I draw from the *tone* of her refusal."

"Same here," Stickney remarked.

"She only means to marry an Englishman," Charley Ambridge muttered offhandedly.

"There's your chance, then"—from Stickney—"since you think it's an international question. Go in and win. Try, try, try again. That's what this child means to do."

Ambridge was looking at the moon without seeing her, his strong lips pressed; and he said: "I know what she wants. B.B.'s a B.A., she isn't Sally-down-our-alley, and doesn't listen to every whisper that her heart whispers her. I fancy I know what that whispers; but her intellect, too, must be reached—her imaginative intellect—she must think

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her man a bit of a god, or she'll only hear with one ear. I once saw her looking at a portrait of Mazzini—adoringly. That's the big thing in the girl, a great passion for moral strength."

"I, for example, 'throw up the sponge', if it is a question of moral strength," the Frenchman mentioned.

"Ditto here," from Peter C. Stickney.

"Still," Charley Ambridge said, "the thing might be turned to account. One, for instance, may merely *seem* to be morally strong——"

"Oh, I see, you'd pretend——"

"I don't say how, but I shouldn't mind betting you ten pounds each that, if I put my hook in her nose, I lead her into a trickier maze than she has led me into to-night. A microbe like her, declaring war in epigrams against man? How if man, without epigrams, declares war against her? I'd toss and catch her in this hand like a cricket-ball!"

Stickney started to hum "When apples grow on an orange-tree," for each had a profound disbelief in the other's chances of success with the lady.

"Say within six months from to-night!" cried Ambridge, irritated by apples on orange-trees.

"Bravo!" — from Perrin-Guérin — "put two noughts to your ten pounds and I take the bet!"

"And!!" added Stickney.

Charley Ambridge hesitated. To the other two money was dust, but to a journalist a thousand pounds is something. He had his plan ready, but he

realised that Life has a way of running down shunt-lines... However, he was in a state of pique and irritation; and when Stickney said "We'll take

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you two to one, to make things square," Ambridge, bringing down his big first, said: "Done, then!"

Then, with their heads laid together, they made definite the details of the wager: Ambridge undertook to marry Miss Barbara Barrington within six months from that night; he to lose two thousand pounds, if he failed; to gain four thousand, if he succeeded; the other two to use any means in their power to frustrate the marriage, short of informing anyone that there was a wager.

"Right-o," Ambridge said at last, "I'm game. And now let us put our wits together to get out of this grotesque convict-settlement."

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After that night the three men avoided the subject of the wager; it was in the air, and in their heads, but nothing was said. Stickney and Perrin-Guérin waited for something to happen: and a fortnight passed.

Then one night Stickney, as he was entering the smoke-room of a club, caught sight of Charley Ambridge tête-à-tête with a man whose face he recognized—whom he had heard called "Percival," a footman of Miss Barrington's at Balcarry Hall: and Stickney drew back, asking himself: "Now, what can this Percival be doing in town head-to-head like this...?"

It was two nights after this that a theft was committed at Balcarry. Miss Barrington, who was much of an entertainer, had given a *dîner dansant* for a *débutante*, had retired late, and her lady's-maid had laid her jewels in her *cabinet de toilette*. The next morning a window was found open, and a necklace, three rings, a diamond comb, were missing.

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The heiress communicated with Scotland Yard...

But when, on the third morning after, a detective-inspector presented himself at Balcarry, Miss Barrington came out with the announcement that she had decided, after all, not to prosecute, if the criminal was discovered; and when he remonstrated, her answer was: "It is quite a free country, is it not? I shall not prosecute;" on which he went away with a sense of the waywardness of woman...

Two hours later, in the afternoon, the footman Percival, standing in the lounge-hall of Balcarry, saw outside the coming of a phaeton, charioted by a large man, the flocks of his beard all scattered on the breeze of his own making—Charley Ambridge, who on coming up the steps, said to Percival: “Mistress at home?”

“To you, sir,” Percival answered with a simper that was full of meaning.

“Good. Announce me.”

He followed the footman up to a so-called “Small Drawing-room,” and there stood looking out at Summer in the park, all plots and strategy.

He had put his hand to the plough now—no looking back—a freckled hand that had fished men and things quite as deep-sea as “B.B.” before...

“And B.B.’s as good as a man,” he told himself, feeling, so far, no remorse, only nervousness as to whether his luck stood good; “B.B.’s a B.A.—studying to be a LL.D.—not a bad book that of hers on ‘Mediæval Guilds’, only too ‘new’—people in the Middle Ages didn’t think like that, dear one. And here’s my own ‘Whirligig’—with cut leaves, too—and ‘The Social Republic’, and a Toynbee Hall

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card, and a Fabian Soci—too much nerves about her! What with ‘influencing politics’—but I’ll look well into all that, little one, if only my luck——”

There was a cascade of silk-muslin on the stair, a laugh behind him, and now he stood bowing...

“Straight from town?”

“Yes, I come like a Dissolution——”

“No, I half-expected you.”

He took no notice of this statement for some time, and, sitting vis-à-vis, she on a Sheraton couch, he on a chair, they spoke of last night’s town-events, till, in a pause, he asked: “Did you say that you expected me?”

“Half”—with a laugh.

“How so?” He looked puzzled.

“I may tell you that later. What you have to do in the first place is to tell your story, and so let us get over the mere business-part of your visit the sooner.”

His expression of puzzlement rose to pantomime. “This is extraordinary! You know, then——?”

“That you have a story? Yes, I know, I know. Tell it me.”

"Well, it is wonderful that you can know; but—I will tell it."

Then at once, his eyes bent upon the carpet, he bluntly told it: she had lost some jewels, and it was *he* who had stolen them... had been much embarrassed for money, and after her musical evening he—knowing the house well—had yielded to the temptation...

She, for her part, so far from fainting while the tale of shame was being told, was looking at him

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with the kindest smile in her eyes; and when he produced the necklace, rings, comb, wrapped in tissue-paper, she took them with an underlook that meditated upon him with no little favour. She said: "But why the uncalled-for restitution? You should start a Spontaneous Society of Poor but Honest Burglars——"

"The restitution is not uncalled-for," he said: "I believe the police to be on my track——"

"I may tell you at once," she said quickly, "that you need fear nothing from them... But suppose *I* now denounce you?"

"It is only what I ought to expect," he said dejectedly.

"And you came prepared for such a thing in case I decided to do so?"

He stole a look upward at her eyes, at her dark-red whirl of hair that glared flagrantly against her snowy robe; and he answered: "Fully prepared, of course."

"Oh, well, that was brave of you really!"—with a little flush—"this is social suicide, this confession, is it not? My goodness, what *did* it cost you?"

"Heaven only knows what it cost me," he muttered.

"But your *real* motive for taking upon you this load of suffering—tell it me—trust me."

"I was driven to confess by fear of discovery without confession," he said.

"No, that's not frank. No, let us drop the veil now; I assure you that I know all. This very morning I have received—from a woman—a letter which explains your action in all its nobleness. Forgive me for such barefaced compliment-making. I

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am weak here—only men, I think, and hardly any modern men, can show this moral muscle; women never arrive at driving the knife quite so deep into their vitals; and as I am only a gown——”

She stopped suddenly in quite a flush, holding out her hand to be shaken; and it was then, first, that Charley Ambridge got a glimpse of the weak point in his plot—the remorse that began to peep and gnaw in his own human bosom.

“And don’t ask me,” Barbara went on, “precisely how I got my information. That’s my secret. As for the search after the real criminal, I’ll ’phone at once to the police that the things have been found, so you need give yourself no more headaches on that score. And now let’s talk of other things. Were you at Madame Petrowski’s on Tuesday? I hear it was quite a function.”

She would not let Ambridge go!—he dined, strolled with her and one “Aunt Nat” in the park and in the maze, for which she had a fondness, and she bowed Fauré’s “Berceuse,” Raff, Gounod, to his accompaniment. But the longer he was with her that day, and felt the sweets of her favour, the angrier grew his inward growls at the bet, at Stickney, at Perrin-Guérin, and, above all, at himself. When he drove away near nine in the night he was as uncomfortable as he was triumphant.

As for Barbara, she stood on a terrace-step looking after, as he rattled away; and presently, gazing at the moon, she sighed: “What a bush of beard! probably teeming with micro-organisms:—but with rough old manhood, too, the dear.”

There may have previously been some hankering

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in the tail of her eye toward that beard; anyway, three months later her engagement was in the papers; and there were women who said: “How is the mighty fallen!”

At the news of that engagement Mons, le Due de Perrin-Guérin and Mr. Peter C. Stickney met, and looked into each other’s eyes; and said the duke: “How has he done it, my friend?”

Stickney jerked the head, like one who knows more than he says. He thought that he had a clue in that Percival whom he had seen in confabulation with Ambridge; and one day he motored down to Balcarry.

But he learned there that, two weeks before, Percival had been dismissed from Miss Barrington’s service for unsoberness. And now the problem was

to unearth Percival.

This was not easy: Percival was so small a person, that the search was for a needle in a bundle of hay. However, Stickney put some money into it; and one night, five months after the wager, Percival presented himself at Stickney's flat in the Savoy Hôtel. He had been drinking, sank into a chair; the little lean Yankee, in clothes that looked too baggy for him, stood before him; beverage stood by his hand; and soon he was answering the questions of a keener wit than his, even if his had been clear.

"So that wedding comes off in a month's time," Stickney said: "how does your ex-mistress take it, my man?"

"Never was in such high spirits in her life, Sir—up to the time I left her, that's a month gone now, very near."

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"Well, that's as it should be. And as to Mr. Ambridge, now—how does he take it?"

"Mr. Ambridge practically lives at the village, Sir," Percival answered with a leer—"too far gone in love to come up to town once a week—though spooning is hardly what you'd expect from a gentleman of Mr. Ambridge's experience and free disposition neither."

Stickney chuckled a little viciously at this. He said: "I suppose, now—he's keeping clear of me lately somehow—I suppose he's pretty elated over the whole deal?"

"Well, no, Sir, you'd hardy think that, if you saw him now—just the opposite. A deal of the rollicking way he had with him has left Mr. Ambridge. As the wedding comes nearer, he gets bluer and bluer."

"He does, does he? Bluer! What makes him go like that?"

"Oh, well, to tell the plain truth, Sir, it's Mr. Ambridge's conscience. He's got a secret a-preying on his mind."

"He has? A secret? Now, if there was only somebody who knew what that secret is——"

"Oh, *I* know, Sir, what it is."

His hands in his ample pockets, Stickney meditated upon the glass which Percival held aslant. He had a right to know; to his mind the loss of a bet was a slur upon one's 'cuteness; and he flushed now at the hope which sprang in him of delaying the wedding beyond the six months' limit, if not of frustrating it.

He made a step forward, saying: "Now, look

here, my man, do you mean to tell me that Mr. Ambridge entrusts his secrets to you?"

"This one he did"—from Percival—"or rather part of it; part I found out for myself."

Stickney stepped quick to a bureau, came back with bank-notes.

"You stick to this lot, Percival," he said: "I may tell you that Mr. Ambridge has given me the right to know that secret, so it's nothing if you tell me."

Percival, out of work, was in need, and his unsteady hand went out, but drew back, as he breathed: "Oh, I don't hardly think I dare."

"Yes, you do, Percival—fifty of them—don't make a fuss."

"Well, it was like this," Percival suddenly said: "you may have heard that Miss Barrington lost some jewels five months gone?"

"Aye—I think——"

"It was *me* as stole 'em."

"The devil it was!"

But before Percival could say another word there was a ring, and Stickney, peeping out of his dining-room, as his man opened the flat-door, cried out: "By Jupiter, old chap, you get there in the very nick of time. The presence here is that of one Percival..."

It was the Due de Perrin-Guérin; and he, in a dove-coloured dust-coat, monocle in eye, stood before the fireplace, to listen to the retelling of what had been already told.

"Before this gentleman, Percival," Stickney said, "you may spread yourself out with perfect freedom."

"Don't I know the duke very well, Sir?" Percival

queried: "don't I remember the very night he put the question to Miss Barrington? But, as I was saying, I took the jewels, and then opened a window to throw the suspicion on a burglar. All this, of course, I did by Mr. Ambridge's instructions; and the next night I gave him the jewels."

"Isn't it prutt?" Stickney leered at the due... "Go on, Percival!"

"That's about all I know"—Percival gazed at space, fingering his chin.

"Ah, don't beat about the bush, my man," Stickney said: "now for the part you found out for yourself."

"Only that a few days afterwards Mr. Ambridge came and confessed to Miss Barrington that it was *he* who had stole the things. I listened outside the Small Drawing-room, and heard it all."

"But what's it all mean? Wasn't she horrified?"

"Not a bit, Sir—fell in love with him there and then! You see, that morning she had received a letter, from a lady, as she thought, which threw quite a different light on the matter. Miss Barrington left the letter in a work-basket in the library, and I read it. Of course, *I* knew it wasn't any lady, but Mr. Ambridge, had sent it."

"But this letter, what was in it?"—Stickney's eyes were alight as when he did a big thing in "the Street."

"That letter, gentlemen, was a work of art," Percival decisively said: "It was supposed to come from a poor gentlewoman whose husband had been a college-chum of Mr. Ambridge; but, as the two lads grew up, said the letter, so one of 'em had chose

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the wrong road, and all these years Mr. Ambridge had supported the unhappy pair of them. But now the husband had gone beyond everything, and committed the burglary. It was his first spurt in that line; this last awful step had kind of shocked him back into his senses; and if, just at this time, he could manage to leave the country, all might yet be well. But the police were on his track, and this was why Mr. Ambridge, not knowing what else to do to save him, had taken upon himself to go through one last great sacrifice, by making his own self out to be the criminal. He had got the jewels from the real man, and might be expected any day, said the letter, with his confession. The poor gentlewoman had tried to induce him to give up the idea of ruining himself for her husband; she could not accept such a sacrifice; and that was why she wrote the letter—to counteract the confession that Mr. Ambridge was going to make. Those, gentlemen, were something like the very words of the letter."

Percival was silent. All, for a minute, were silent. Then the arm of Perrin-Guérin waved, and he called out: "Vive l'espionage!"

"Great old Percival!" cried Stickney—"here's the lucre for you. But for the future, if anyone trusts you with a secret, see to it, friend, that nothing tempts you to divulge it."

Percival now attempted, stood up, made his bows, went out to the lift; and Stickney and the duke stood there, looking into each other's eyes.

“Was there ever such an imposture?”—from Perrin-Guérin.
Stickney cast back his head and began to laugh

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loud, and the duke caught it, cast back his, and they laughed together.

“We have him!” cried Perrin-Guérin.

“We have! We have!” cried Stickney.

Now, however, the duke started at some thought which spurred him; first lit a cigar, so as not to seem in haste; then said: “I just looked in *en passant*—must go.”

His departure, however, was too sudden, and gave rise to the thought in Stickney: “I was an ass to let Perrin-Guérin hear the thing”—he now pacing with his springy steps, a natty little figure in swallow-tail and *verni* shoes.

“Yes, I was an ass,” he said: “a fool is a man who is wise too late.”

He saw that it might be a serious thing to expose the fraud now, the marriage being hardly a month off—there would be a shock; and though, by the terms of the wager, he had a right to interfere, that was nothing: Ambridge was more or less his friend. But, then, so, too, was B.B.—she ought to be enlightened. Would the shock be a big or a little shock, to either, or both? Anyhow, Perrin-Guérin would act. “A Frenchman is a being all head,” Stickney said—“he has no humour, no milk of kindness: no poor-houses in France,” Perrin-Guérin would act. He had said “We have him!”—callous—and then had taken himself off. And the point was this: that the one of the two who opened B.B.’s eyes, since they had to be opened, might gain a tremendous gratitude! In her gratitude, and her spite, she might turn fondly from the impostor to the exposer of the imposture...

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“Davenport, my coat!” cried Stickney...

He was soon hurrying to Waterloo Station...

At the same time Perrin-Guérin was in a motorcar, flying for Balcarry Hall.

He had reasoned in the same way as Stickney. “Stickney will act,” he had said, “if I do not: therefore I must. The Americans are not *bons*—not kind and good.”

And each had prided himself on his masterly promptitude in setting out instantly, not dreaming that the other would act that very night...

It was about nine when they set out, and before ten Perrin-Guérin was driving through Lydney, the townlet nearest Balcarry; soon after which, Stickney hurried out of the little Surrey station, leapt into a cab, and was off for the Hall.

The Frenchman arrived hardly ten minutes before the other, to find the mansion a blaze of light, groups strolling over the terraces, dancing going on in the ball-room. But he could nowhere discover Barbara Barrington; and “Aunt Nat,” to whom he put a question in the stand-up supper-room, said to him with a certain smirk of mystery: “Try Lover’s Walk.”

The duke again went out to seek—a dark night, moonless, but thronged with stars in a black sky: by whose light, some distance from the house, he suddenly saw a sight that made him start—Stickney hurrying up the terraces!

Perrin-Guérin hid behind an oak...

This sight of Stickney put him in a flurry and hurry; and when some minutes later he was walking rapidly down Lover’s Walk, peering forward into the

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dark, on he went, with no thought of what was in store for him, until, suddenly, he was spinning, trapped, with half a laugh, and half a hiss of irritation: again the flea of the maze had bitten him.

He ran distractedly about, seeking escape at random; then out he cast his arms dramatically, hissing: “All lost! Stickney is even now interviewing her!”

But this was not so: for not many minutes afterwards Stickney himself was spinning flea-bitten, trapped in the labyrinth of box. He had been told that the duke had been seen in the Hall; he, too, had been spurred to flurry and hurry; and, stepping quick down Lover’s Walk, thinking other thoughts than thoughts of mazes, he had put his foot into it.

“Now, if this ain’t a darned thing,” he stood and said, with an underlook of reproach.

Now, as the circle of the maze is surrounded by an edge of beech-wood, it is dark in there o’ dark nights—a very romantic place, where within the blacknesses such things go on as sea-shells tell of, which only the hare’s leer, perhaps, and the owl, can see, though in the heart of man, too, are instincts and rumours of them: so the two friends, unconscious of each other’s presence, wandered in and out in those shadows, getting more

sucked in, until, almost simultaneously, both stopped at a sound of voices near—murmuring voices at the centre—and both stole close, knowing one voice by its cold repose of tone; the other was his—Ambridge's.

They could scarcely escape hearing now, and they stooped with hands on knees to hear, both in the same circle of box, but opposite each other: and

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under the duke's eyes a glow-worm gave her light, and near in Stickney's ears a cricket was screeking.

It was Ambridge whom they first heard clearly, and he was saying: "I do not ask for forgiveness, Barbara—don't expect it; and I free you of any obligation you may be under in respect of me."

They heard her answer.: "Surely that goes without saying."

Then he: "Well, let it be so."

Silence.

Then he again: "I don't know whether the fact that I love you, and that I have confessed only because I love you, has any weight with you." She did not answer at once; then her contralto trilled on the ear: "It has some weight, since I am not made of stone; and the confession at least shows that I was not altogether wrong in suspecting some old Roman stuff in you—hence my wobbly state. If you had let someone *else* open my eyes——But, anyway, it was too cruel, really. And the disillusionment—you don't know how proud I was of you. What reason remains...?"

Ambridge's voice was heard: "The reason of pity; I am really, now, pitifully fond of you."

Silence again, till she said: "I am not straight-laced—you know that. I see nothing monstrous in the mere unveracity of your trick: you are not of the sun-kindled, that is clear, and you acted after your kind, I suppose. I can even like your audacity, and a certain cleverness in the conception; but it was the callousness of the whole thing! To turn me into a bet—Didn't you care at all for me? Not a little?"

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"It doesn't seem so!"—from Ambridge—"perhaps it was your fortune that I was mainly after! It is since then—since then. I don't seem to have dreamt at that time——"

Barbara broke in upon him with “Oh, well, it is no use keeping on, when the end is inevitable. A woman is only a pigeon, Mr. Charley, with original sin in it: so bill to me, and I’ll bill to you.”

After which nothing very audible came out for two minutes; then Ambridge’s raised voice: “Barbara, I don’t deserve this—I can hardly bear it—the wedding shall be put off——”

Her answer came out low: “Goosie, since it has to be some time, why lose the wager after all your pains? We’ll chuck the whole four thousand pounds about together on our honeymoon. Come, let’s go out.”

At those cruel woman’s-words Claude de Perrin-Guérin’s eyes turned white to heaven, and with a grimace he made a move on tiptoe to run for it. At the same time Stickney, with a Yankee’s groan, rose from his stoop to run, before he should be seen; and these two, in running round that circle, suddenly found themselves face to face.

At once the whole truth of why both were there illumined each, upon which a spasm of laughter pierced them, their hands covering their mouths, out of which puffed a fume of buffoonery; and they were still preoccupied with each other’s apparition, when a “Hallo! Why, it’s Stickney—And you, too, Claude?” was upon them, from Ambridge.

There was an awkwardness, as they came together, a group of four; Barbara’s smirk was observed to

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be sardonic, and she asked: “Is it Providence or a conspiracy?”

But that passed; and it was in merry mood that the three friends, arm in arm, tracked Barbara’s blanched robe, which travelled like a wraith before them out of the maze.

* * * *

The relation of this tale was the occasion of the breaking out of quite a debate among the ladies as to the behaviour of Ambridge in thus deceiving, and as to the easiness of Barbara in pardoning, everyone proffering her opinion, except Joy, who answered in her arch way when the sailor-boy asked what she thought “I must think it over—ask me this day six months.”

“She lacked pride, that girl,” Mdlle. Cazalès called out: “if there had not been another man, I should not have married him!”

To which Fragson, whose oar was in every water, called back “What women want is to be won, they don’t care how, whether by tomahawk, ambush, rape-of-the-Sabines, stocks-and-shares brigandage, or tale-telling. The man they admire is the man who has somehow contrived to win them; and the more women he wins, the more the enthusiasm of each for him. I knew a foolish little man in a hôtel at Bournemouth for whom all the ladies in the place were love-sick because two of them had scratched each other for him. Wives were once won by tribal fighting——”

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“Mr. Fragson’s opinion of women is not high, I think!” Aunt Anne cried out.

“I’m afraid it isn’t,” Fragson answered—“not much higher than my opinion of men.”

“Bravo!” Maître de Gaud called out through the war of tongues—a young Lyonnais of growing reputation in the law-courts, who had long been in love with Joy, and shot a boyish leer her way whatever he said or did, as by a disease of the tail of the eye: “bravo! woman is the wine, and man is the water!”

“Hence the flatness of marriage when they mix,” Fragson remarked.

“Mr. Fragson does not think well of matrimony either?” sardonically asked Lady Sartory.

“There are many happy marriages”—from Fragson—“but none delicious.”

“So that Mr. Fragson never intends to enter that ponderous, leaden state?”

“Depends upon the pondering leddy, who may be blind to my merits. And I am too proud to win her in false colours, as Ambridge won Barbara.”

“But Ambridge did not win Barbara by his false colours,” called Maître de Gaud, who was an expert in Woman: “she had loved him before, but, having persuaded herself that she disdained wedlock, was waiting for a pretext to yield to him, seized it when it presented itself, and even when it was wrecked continued to cling to him. Nothing can be more adorable than the *câlineries* and grave-faced frivolity of the female nature! Woman is _____”

But now baskets were being brought in from the Castle, and a clatter of knives and china complicated the chatter.

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CHAPTER VII

THE next day a *fête champêtre* was given, to which the country-people round Castle Lanchester flocked. It was out in “The *Sapins*” (Normandy pine-forest) beyond the north claw of the harbour, so that one walked out of The Sapins to the sands at the claw’s back.

The people came in their coloured clothes, to eat cakes and *swisses* amid streams of that “*bon cidre de Normandie*,” and to dance to guitars on the grass, though, God knows, they had no need of human music in there that day of breezes, because of that voluminous music whose rumours streamed through the trees in torrents of noising, commoving all the forest with its theme, and did not cease, could not cease, but lalled its theme, and because of the basso that the sea lalled back, and could not stop, to the topic of that alto. This liturgy of the *sapins*, which gorged the tympanum with its organ-wawlings all that livelong morning, was sometimes accompanied by a going off of guns remotely: for there was a *tir* (or shooting-range) within the wood, where the *pioupious* (or Tommies) of that regimental district practised; also, some of the men of the Castle had brought rifles, and were firing for a prize. As for Joy, she walked down to the beach between Fragson and Tom Bates, making yellow that tail of the eye of Maître de Gaud, who, like many of the men, had

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by this time got into a condition of jealousy of Fragson, taking it now for granted that it was *he* who would tell the best tale, recognising in him the greatest activity of intellect in the group of suitors, and conscious, moreover, that he and Joy, being both Socialists, were birds of a feather. But among the girls, on the other hand, it was Tom Bates who, for some reason, seems to have been considered the winner; one whispered another “Will strict justice be done? If the Bates boy does not tell the best tale, will he not be *held* to have told it?:” and about this time some bets began to be made.

Down there at the brink of the *sapins*, where the sands begin, is a frog-pond in undergrowth, whither a group strolled to gather round Joy, and down there luncheoned, loitered, the ladies’ hairs led ever astray by the breaths of heaven, their breasts all haunted with echoes of that hymn of

holiday that was being hymned, some of them sometimes holding their car to a tree-trunk, to hear bumping about within it mysterious rumblings, bowel-sounds, whenever the aspiring pine-trunk, that dwelt deep up in the honey sea, went doddery, as if heady with excess of heaven, and rocked: until now it was time to be driving back to the Castle. And when they were back, and all down in the arbour once more, Maître de Gaud, whose day it was, announced that he would recount the story of a woman—he having earned the reputation of an expert in that branch of learning: so, seated with his knees between his arms on the slabs of the streamlet's bank, he proceeded to relate a tale that he named

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THE BELL OF ST. SÉPULCRE.

It was during my tramp through Provence three summers ago that I came one evening to Lebrun-les-Bruyères, a hamlet near the bottom of the Bezons valley. Here I found the inn so poor, that I resolved to tramp on to Cargnac, four miles off.

“But,” said an old vigneron, whom I asked to put me on the path through the forest, “you should go round about by the road.”

“Why?” I asked him—“that means another kilomètre?”

“We of these parts hardly use the path now,” was his answer: “don’t you go that way”—with a certain earnestness and admonition...

“What, wolves about here?” I asked him.

He lowered his voice to say: “You may see someone named La Mère Gouvion”—as if to say “you may see Beelzebub.”

I supposed that he meant a ghost, and, as I knew something of Southern superstitiousness, and was in a hurry, I handed him a franc, and went on by the forest-path.

I found it in some parts choked with bush—myrtle, kermes-oak—which I had to part before me; and by the moonshine above the bush I saw in that short distance two of those mounds named barrows, placed there by “the fairies;” then, when I had tramped three kilomètres through a rather intolerable solitude, the shock came’: three mètres to my left within a sort of clearing I saw the woman...

She was seated on a fragment of one of those rocks that they call “menhirs.”

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I had the impression in the hazy moonshine that she was moving her shoulders slowly from side to side, her hand supporting her jaw, some grace in the fall of her rags suggesting a statue set on a pedestal. Her stature, I could see, was gigantic—her great arms like clubs, her great bosom and spread of shoulder, her mouth open in a cavern of darkness that looked oblong, her hair black-and-grey, a tangle of snakes; and, as I walked past, her eyes followed me with that kind of gaze with which an ox stops cropping to gaze after a passer.

The image of this woman filled my mind until I got to Cargnac, near nine; and that same night, while sitting in an inn-garden with swings, nine-pins, arbours, I was told by my host the story of “La Mère Gouvier.”

“She came,” he told me, “of a well-to-do family who owned land on the far side of Lebrun-les-Bruyères, her father being a mighty big man, known as a hard bargainer as far as Avignon and Orange, and in Lebrun everybody feared him, even the cure, for it was said that he did not believe in the good God, he drank half a litre of cognac every night, so that one could hear him marching up and down his verandah to a late hour, quarrelling with nobody, and carrying on; terrible he was when the drink had him, like a man mad with sunstroke.

“And one summer, when the phylloxera had rotted his vine-leaves, and things were looking bad for harvest, on an awful night long remembered he raised his hand, defied the heavens to do their worst, and challenged the bell of St. Sépulcre to ring in his

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hearing—for the bell was said to be a little audible from his yard.

“His wife ran to hide under a bed, dreading the bell-toll, his daughter Maude herself trembled. Some had it to say that the bell did ring in his hearing; however that was, he perished shortly afterwards in convulsions, and was buried without the blessing of the Church.

“Soon after him his good woman also passed away: and Maude Gouvier was left mistress of all.

“And now things began to look alive indeed. If the patch of yellowish moss appeared on all the vine-leaves of the parish, Maude Gouvier’s trellises were still green.”

Maude’s spray and pruning-scissors should, no doubt, have accounted for this prosperity, but there were those who thought of black magic when

the mulberry-disease and the failure of the madder-crop, which were the cry all round, seemed to keep clear of her fields.

“The truth was that her men toiled for her with the consciousness of her hard eyes behind them, for she was more masterful than any man; and, moreover, she covered her land with a new-fangled sort of sandy stuff from Marseilles, so that, the next vintage, sixty barrels of light wine rolled off in her cart to Avignon, as against le père Gouvin’s maximum of fifty-three.

“Meanwhile, no one could stand the sight of her passions, if anything went wrong, as when she threw big Huguénin, the blacksmith, down some stairs for laming a mule in shoeing. In Lebrun-les-Bruyères the cure called ‘Silence!’ at anyone who mentioned

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her name. She had not once been inside the church door since her father’s death.”

But one Sunday morning, she being then thirty-five, Maude, to everyone’s astonishment, turned up in the little church in the valley. “Never,” said my landlord, “was seen such finery, rings and ribbons, though Maude was ordinarily slatternly in dress; and she carried her head high, as though the church was not good enough for her feet, while the cure stammered and changed colour.

“And why do you think she did this? It was as a preliminary to coming out as a married woman, for she was about to marry the little Tombarel, the shoemaker, as was soon known. And there was a great whispering and excitement then, for everyone knew that no one would have wished to marry Maude, rich as she was, a woman whose own father, as report said, had heard the bell: so that Maude must have fixed upon the little Tombarel for her own reasons, and done her own wooing.”

“But which bell is it,” I asked, “that you keep speaking of?”

He looked astonished. “Well, I should have thought that even a stranger... I mean—do I not? —the bell of St. Sépulcre.”

“What does this bell do?” I asked him.

“It is a sound which one should not hear,” he answered, with a frown. “It is believed to bring—well, I could not tell you—evil upon those who hear it.”

He was silent. Then: “But talking of this poor little Tombarel, everyone pitied him. It is said that, on his taking a pair of sabots to the presbytère, the

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priest admonished him to trust to the saints for protection from the Evil One; and, in saying this, he was supposed to throw a stone at Maude Gouvion. A week before the civil marriage Tombarel ran away to Cazalès, but Maude followed him, and, it was said, knocked him down with a box; so they came back together, and were married.

“Soon afterwards Maude gave birth to her son Pierre. As for the poor Tombarel, he did not survive his marriage three months.

“This Pierre grew up a sickly, pale lad; but the uglier everybody thought him, the prouder his mother was of him. He was everything to her—she went foolish with love only to look at him.

“He was a cripple, with disease of the hip-joint, and three times a week for years his mother took him over to La Risolette to be seen to. When the doctor told her that the child could not possibly live, she only laughed, and said the man was a fool who did not know his business. And live it did.

“But Pierre had a mental disease as well—his crazy craving for blood: for to sling a pebble from a catapult into the eye of a pig was his delight. At thirteen he was the death of a little girl, and later on was discovered with a cut that he had made in his own neck. His mother slung him to her shoulder that day, with that square opening of the mouth which was her way in her agitations, and ran to La Risolette with the dead weight, not waiting for a cart. It was the feat of a horse.”

Such, then, was Pierre. The children shrank from contact with him, and it got to be a prophecy in the village that the day would come when the bell of

St. Sépulcre would sound upon the ears of Maude Gouvion’s son.

“But,” said mine host, in a *patois* whose quaintness I despair of quite conveying, “whatever he did, if he stuck a calf, or half killed a child, or lay down all day fuddled by the roadside, his mother still laughed and petted him: this only made her love him the more proudly and the more loudly. She was foolish with her love.”

“Pierre,” he went on, “was sweet on Rosalie Tissot, granddaughter of Tissot, the schoolmaster, the prettiest golden-haired fairy that ever was, engaged to be married to Martin Dejoie, who was a carpenter at La Risolette. Pierre lay in wait for her everywhere, with a patience which was strange for him; but she laughed at his shrunken form, with a derision in

which there was ever more terror than laughter, knowing how cruelly he loved her, hardly knowing perhaps what a peril lay in her laughter.

"When the date of her marriage with Martin Dejoie came near, Pierre went and threw himself at his mother's knees in a room where she sat shelling peas, saying to her: 'Mother, I shall go and kill myself, for I am the laughing-stock of the place because I am not like others, and, if I do not have Rosalie, they will laugh at me the more'. Now, his mother's heart was like a harp to him, he knew that to tell her of the folks' laughing was to lash her into a scratching cat, and 'Wait, Pierre', says she now over her pease, quite quietly: 'wait, my son; you shall marry this girl'.

"That same night when the village was asleep Mother Gouvier wrapped her head up, and came

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down upon Tissot's cottage near the church, Tissot nearly dropping dead with fright when he hobbled from bed in his red-wool night-cap and saw her standing there, so big that she had to bend her body to get in. Well, she offered everything for Rosalie—eight thousand francs in the Crédit at Avignon, the olives, the two presses, the stock and plant—all should be Pierre's and Rosalie's: and meantime the old Tissot sat shivering, hands on knees, not knowing what to say.

"At last he stammers that Rosalie would not consent, since her marriage with Martin Dejoie was a marriage of love. 'Rosalie is only a child', says la Mère Gouvier; 'leave her to me 'Well, well', says Tissot.

"So Mother Gouvier returned home satisfied. If only matters had rested there! But she had hardly gone when Tissot woke up his grandson, and sent him with a note to tell Martin Dejoie to be sure to come over to Lebrun the next morning. So Martin Dejoie came; but, on coming, he put his head in at the school-door, the children saw him, and two hours later Mother Gouvier knew all about that meeting. The two men had a confabulation together, Tissot declaring that the only way was for Martin to carry off Rosalie secretly to Avignon the night before the ten days' notice was up, and marry her there. But it was no secret in the village that three of the days were already gone, and the silly old man did not stop to consider that Mother Gouvier would surely know when the ten days would expire. As a matter of fact, she had no sooner heard of that interview between Tissot and Dejoie than she knew perfectly

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well what had been settled. It is said in Lebrun-les-Bruyères that she sent a message that same evening to Dejoie, asking him to come and talk the matter over with her, but that Dejoie would not even receive the message. If this is true, it was the last attempt made by la Mère Gouvion to change Dejoie's mind in his scheme to outwit her."

At eleven, then, in the night preceding that tenth day of notice, Martin Dejoie, a tall, active chap, was crossing the moor between La Risolette and Lebrun-les-Bruyères, the moor on which stands St. Sépulcre. He was coming to meet Rosalie, who, with Tissot's old *gouvernante*, was waiting for him in a cart behind the presbytère-wood, to be off with him to Avignon; and he was taking the shortest road to her, though people coming from La Risolette to Lebrun usually make a détour to avoid the moor, so desolate is its barren expanse, on which grows only vine-stumps and some lavender-shrubs, with here or there a miasmatic "clair" (pool), or a cypress standing out blighted against the sky, or a gang of those black rocks, having hollows, that the Provençals call "cagnards." Over all north-west winds draw along volumes of a white dust, wide-winged, there being often mistral over the moor when the valleys lie tranquil.

At one part of this Dead Sea Border of Provence stands, where it has stood since the time of the Franks, the ruins of St. Sépulcre, choked now with brambles, hiding behind a strange rankness of vegetation. But the belfry remains unbroken, and, they say, the bell-rope, and the bell.

I will not delay to tell you the ancient tale of bale

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which gave to this bell its awesomeness among all those glens: but for the poor wretch who hears its tone life is practically over, heart fails and brain —this throughout a district of sceptical France extending from beyond Lebrun-les-Bruyères quite on, I believe, to Hudin: the hearer of the bell is accursed; what he sets about shall fail, and shall rebound with tribulation upon his head; if he be not instantly struck down, his life will still be poisoned; the air will hurt him; water will burn him; his blessedness will be in death.

On the night when Martin Dejoie started out for Rosalie from La Risolette the mist on the moor was luminous with moonlight, and only a little wind moved: so that Mother Gouvion could see some distance from the church-step, where she stood hidden within the mass of sarsaparilla and kermes-oaks that choked the church-portal. "For many years no foot had

ventured so near St. Sépulcre as hers this night, and she drank brandy from a vial to keep her defiance bright in her brain—all that I am telling you now being only what la Mère Gouvion herself revealed long afterwards, and every word's true. She had groped to see if the bell-rope was still there, intending, if not, to drag herself up like a cat to get at the bell; but the rope was there, still pretty strong, though rotted—she could see a little by the rays of moonlight that came through the ruins; and now she stood peering between the bushes at the footpath over the moor, waiting for Martin Dejoie to appear: for she understood that, with such a business in hand, he would not make a détour round St. Pierre, but would come over the moor.

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“At last, near eleven, a sound of someone whistling reached her, for Martin did not like to be passing so near the bell, so was whistling to himself for company; and at once Mother Gouvion set to work, first plugging up her ears with cotton-wool, and over this a bandage, her plan being to make the bell clang, yet not hear it herself. Her only trouble was the doubt whether the man coming was Martin. Suppose it was Pierre himself? Pierre sometimes crossed the moor at night; Pierre whistled. But it was all right—it was Martin—she saw that, when he had got opposite. He stopped his whistling then, bent his head, crossed his breast—in the vigour of his life—a young man just going to be married—suddenly clang, clang, clang for him...

“On her face she lay watching him where he had dropped against one of the cagnards; then she stole away home, elated, thinking in herself, ‘I didn't hear the bell-sound! I didn't hear it!’

“Well, Rosalie and Tissot waited in vain for Martin Dejoie that night; it was not till five days later that his body was found at the bottom of that ravine north of the moor that is called ‘Le Dé du Diable’. Whether he tumbled down there in his distraction, or dashed himself down in his despair, is not known, but he was believed to have heard the bell; and it was years before anyone supposed that his death was not owing to an act of God.

“And so la Mère Gouvion kept her word; and Rosalie in a few months was married to Pierre.

“But,” said my host, in his Doric patois, “it was never a good thing for la Mère Gouvion that she did what she had done. Rosalie was the worst wife that

Pierre could have had, for she was so winning and sweet, and he loved her so much, that for months at a time he was a changed lad: and the result was this, that there would ensue reactions, during which the white face of that little lame man became a fright in the valley, he going about like a dog with the hydrophobia, his eyes alight. Once he stabbed his mother in the arm, and sometimes had to be watched lest he should stab himself. And so it went on near five years.

“And they had misfortunes in the vineyard, too. There came three bad years, when even L’Hermitage and La Nerte and the big vintages of Provence came to nothing; in the fourth year la Mère Gouvin’s madder-yield was a gone hope before May; and she had to sign a paper with the agent at Cargnac which almost compromised the shelter over her head. So she was not very happy in her mischief-doing, after all.

“But she adored her ‘petit’, her ‘little one’, never less, gloried in secret over the deed she had done for him; and when he made himself a terror she hugged herself, preferring terror to laughing-stock. ‘They won’t grin with their ugly gums at my petit, my little one, now she’d say.

“And one bitter winter’s night all came to an end...

“Pierre had broken loose again; screams reached even to the village from the Gouvin vineyard; and presently a girl came running down to the presbytère, saying that Rosalie would be killed. Heaven knows what really happened, for Rosalie was never seen again, so it is supposed that Pierre must have

killed her, and that la Mère Gouvin did away with her body somehow; but no body was ever discovered, so that all that part of the business remains a mystery. Mother Gouvin, who raved out a great deal of what I am saying now during her brief imprisonment afterwards, never said anything about this matter.

“However, when the cure hears this, he begins to pray, then saddles his mule, and gallops off through the gale for Avignon. Before midnight a body of *sergents* arrive at the vineyard; they search for Pierre; Pierre cannot be found. La Mère Gouvin, sewing, with her mouth opened square, tells them that she does not know where he has gone to.”

A wild night—I have seen three such in Provence—lightnings that terrify, a very deluge of water, tempest from the north calling to whirlwind from the west: a Southern storm... Mother Gouvin dashed out into it the moment she found herself free of the *sergents*—forgot her uncovered head, but remembered to take every sou she possessed. She had arranged to meet Pierre out on the moor, the only safe meeting-place, intending, it seems, to take, or send, him to the coast, to get him aboard a ship—nothing would be impossible to her. The officers, it was true, were scouring the valley on horseback with lanterns; but they were nothing: she would outwit them...

But when, on reaching the moor, she ran to the agreed *cagnard*, Pierre was not in it; to the next—Pierre not there; and with distracted runs she dashed from *cagnard* to *cagnard*. Her heart misgave her now, her glance questioned the heavens—they were

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black enough; and, stumbling about within a tempest of hair, a pillar of seaweed that stumbles, she lifted her voice: “*Pierre!*”—wayward boy of her heart: where, then, was he?

And another terror struck her—the bell... it was believed to bleat some midnights when storms were abroad on the moor... “But not to-night!”—and, as she said this, a vaster tantrum of the tempest terrorized her. She stumbled and was down in the mud; a prayer broke from her.

A night of climaxes of wind: and in the midst of each the woman beseeching, coaxing: “Any other night, not to-night; it would not be right; would be hard on a poor mother’s heart”—for hours, till the gale began to abate, and the danger ended.

It was only toward morning, when, though the darkness was as black as ever, the storm had lulled, and her dreads of the bell were at rest, it was then that, all at once—she heard it. Not a clamorous clang, clang, this time, as when she had rung it for Martin Dejoie, but one toll only, floating out doleful on the breast of the trembling air.

It was over, then? No hope? Suddenly the woman threw up her head, gnashed, shook her fist, as her father before her had done, at the bell, at the heavens. “Bleat away bell...!” Bells were nothing: she would discover her little one as soon as there was a little light—would tear him from the clutch of the *sergents*: it would be all right yet...

“On setting out once more to search, she found herself just in front of the church, and, as some sheet-lightning was playing then, she chanced to

observe the mark of a man's foot before the church-portal.

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At this she started, chilled to the marrow by a sense of the supernatural: for it was not to be believed that any living being would have come so near the bell on a night so wild. Under her breath she uttered "Martin Dejoie?"... for what power had rung the bell in her hearing? it had not been the wind!

"Just then a tramp of horses' hoofs reached her ears—the *sergents* still ransacking the countryside for Pierre; and she ran into the bush at the church-door, lest they might spy her in the play of the lightning. Five years before she had stood just there—and done a thing. And now her flesh shivered to see the sarsaparilla freshly trampled, the branches parted: someone had entered St. Sépulcre that night! and at the thought of the vengeance of the murdered dead her heart turned faint."

But some fascination led her steps over the threshold, and she stood in the still thicker gloom within, hearing the rasping of her own throat, hearing the gallop of a heart thumping out the whole gamut of fright, pride, desperation; till, all at once, a blaze of lightning searched the church, and by it was revealed to her the reason why the bell had rung: it was because someone had tied the bell-rope round his throat, kicked away a stone, and hanged himself there. He hung still now: and eye to eye they looked—mother and son.

They found her the next morning wandering on the moor, harmless and listless, with a slanting smile; and they took her to the asylum at Avignon where, after many weeks, something resembling reason returned to her. When they had gathered

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her story from her mutterings, they let her out again; but she would not go home, took up her abode in woods, etc., sleeping in *cagnards*, living on olives, nuts, fruits. Her favourite haunt (if she still lives) is the "menhir" by the abandoned path between Lebrun-les-Bruyères and Cargnac.

* * * *

When this tale had been told, it was noticed that Joy, as never before, joined with her finger-tips in the applause, causing her sailor-boy, as he also

applauded, to lower his left lid speculatively at her.

“But is there *really* such a bell?” the voice of Joy’s Aunt Anne was heard demanding athwart the noise of comments.

“Madam, there is,” Maître de Gaud answered with a bow.

“I still doubt it,” Fragson remarked *sotto voce* to Pascal: “a lawyer is not to be believed even when he tells of a church.”

“There *is* such a bell, for I happen to have been there myself,” remarked Hardacre, the “journalist,” Joy’s richest boy, a fellow who, though still young, was by his brightness and briskness the proprietor of a posse of periodicals, and yet could find time to be in the King’s set, and to know his Europe and his planet by heart.

“In that case,” answered Fragson, “the whole thing may be true, for lawyers have no imagination.”

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“Hullo, what’s all that?” Hardacre asked in his common, off-hand manner, which was partly natural, and partly put-on, so that he might live up to the legend of him in the general imagination. He added “Why, my little brother, St. Mark, is a bit of a lawyer——”

“I don’t care a damn about your little brother St. Mark,” Fragson answered: “I say that lawyers are, or become, the least imaginative of men; and since imagination is the main-spring of consciousness, and the greatest of the faculties, it follows that lawyers are the smallest of animals. For, if they had any imagination, they could not fail to realise the deep inferiority, in comparison with evolved minds, of the minds that made the ‘laws’ they study, and then they could never deign to study them.”

“Well, there’s something in that,” Hardacre said: “myself, I don’t reckon much of the old-time fogeys. But where you writing Johnnies go wrong is in the habit you get into of making extreme statements. No extreme statement hits off the truth. Myself, I am a man who——”

But before ever he could tell what manner of man he was, the Brahmin palmist, Maharamah, who had come that morning from Bond Street, stepped into the grotto, and, in the midst of the business of tea, gave himself to telling the fates of the guests.

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CHAPTER VIII

THIS palmist, Maharamah, was the occasion the next day of quite a sensation among the ladies, when, supporting Fragson's hand on his in the Castle drawing-room, he uttered the words: "You are about to marry one of the wealthiest ladies in the world"—words which turned Fragson into a girl, the fellow flying as fiery red as his beard; and several lightning eyes observed that Joy, who was stitching embroidery near, and heard the words, turned quite white one wee instant, while Hardacre and Tom Bates, seated on each side of Fragson on a couch, exchanged a glance, Bates good-humouredly smiling, Hardacre with a little scowl which meant "the deuce he is!:" for Hardacre, alone of the suitors, had no despair as regards Fragson, felt himself second to none in the matter of tales, "knew a good story when he saw it," and had as to stories his own ideas and theory: so in the afternoon,, when the guests were all again down in the grotto, it was with the confidence of a master of men and of tales that he sat on the well to relate—a cigarette reeking between his fingers, his eyes as brisk as eyes busy in the thick of battle, while the listeners sat pricked to a particular interest in him, as he commenced to relate the tale that he named

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THE PRIMATE OF THE ROSE.

"Friends of the Rose?" said E. P. Crooks to Smyth one night, at the Savage Club: "is it an actual fact that there are secret societies in London?"

And Smyth, with his expression of lazy surprise, replied: "Why, yes. Ask me another time. Come and dine with us two, if you like."

It is a wonder that Crichton Smyth ever did invite Crooks. As editor of *The Westminster Magazine*, he had long known Crooks as a little story-writer, and had never had any such impulse: but suddenly Englishmen, with their genius for discovery, had discovered that they had a Crooks; proceeded to pay him 9d. for writing "the and then Smyth, with his eyebrows of surprise, muttered: "Come and dine with us."

Smyth was of that better aristocracy, the upper middle-class, which gives to England its ladies: slim, clean-looking, old-blooded—not much

blood, and thin; but rare, like wine of Yquem.

Of another family was Crooks—a fatty little man, fat-cheeked, with an outsticking moustache that hung. Still, there was something or other in him—something brisk in his glance, in the dash of his hair across his forehead; and if at seventeen he had vended soda-water from door to door, at twenty-six he was a graduate, and at thirty-six a star.

But he was a gay Romeo, Crooks—in a rather vulgar mood; and Smyth had a sister.

If one had prophesied to Smyth that his sister, Minna Smyth of the Smyths, could possibly commit

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follies for E. P. Crooks, or look twice at Crooks, Smyth would hardly have bothered to smile...

However, the human female can be pretty queer and wayward; and her heart is like spittle on the palm that the Tartar slaps—no telling which way it will pitch.

From that first night of the dinner Minna Smyth shewed herself amiable to the celebrity—a *chic* dinner of dated wines in a flat in Westminster; for editors are awfully well-to-do-people—do you know? The piano there was a mosaiced thing in mother-of-pearl; and in turning Miss Smyth's music, Crooks' fingers got positive magnetism, hers negative, and they met.

She was a tall, thin girl of twenty-five, very like Smyth, very English in type, pretty, but washed-out and superfine, with light eyes of the colour of quinine-solution which X-rays make “fluorescent.” Was Crooks genuinely smitten with this? It is doubtful. Besides, he was married. But she was a conquest worth making, and he was a man ever on the *qui vive* to add yet a photo to his packet, and a feather to his cap.

Minna Smyth, for her part, took studiously from that night to feeding her mind on the spiced meat of Crooks' books, who, meanwhile, had retaliated upon Smyth by banqueting him at the National Liberal, and might drive home anon with him from the Savage. Crooks felt that he was patronising Smyth; and Smyth felt that he was patronising Crooks: for when one has known a tremendous man in his days of “£2-a-thousand-words,” one has no respect for his tremendousness—especially Smyth,

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who was the chillest thing that the Heavens ever invented. At any rate, they became friendly.

During which time Crooks and Minna Smyth had a way of meeting at private views, lectures, concerts—meetings of which Smyth did not know; letters were written which Smyth did not see; and it happened one evening at the flat, at a moment when Smyth was in the next room, that Minna mentioned to Crooks in the course of conversation that on Friday nights her brother was out “at his secret society,” and never came home till 4 a.m.

On this Crooks, picking up her hand, said to her: “I’ll come on Friday night.”

She looked at him under her eyes, meditating upon him; then moved her face from side to side, while her lips took the shape of “No.”

“Something to say,” said he: “I hope you aren’t inexorable.”

Her lids now veiled her eyes, while her bosom rose and rose, unloaded itself of a sigh, and tumbled back.

“Is it yes?” he whispered.

“*Crichton!*” she breathed, with a sudden expression of shrinking and fright in her eyes.

“Oh, I think that that will be all right about Crichton,” Crooks said.

“You don’t *know* him!” she whispered: “his nose goes white...”

Smyth now came in; and presently, when Minna had gone out, Crooks said to him: “By the way, how about that wondrous ‘Friends of the Rose’, Smyth, that you are always to tell me of?” He threw himself into roomy red velvet opposite Smyth’s

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red velvet on the other side of a fire—it was December—and drank from a large and fragile glass.

“What can one tell of it, if it is a secret society?” Smyth asked, his eyebrows raised over lazy lids that seemed to strain to be open, for there was an ample valley of country between his eyebrows and his nose-tip.

“I mean to say—is the thing *real*? Is it like *London*?”—from Crooks, who had an inquisitive intellect, and, then, was ever on the quest of “copy.” He added: “Years ago I wrote a story about a secret society—you must remember it; but I never for a moment believed that there are such things. Anarchism, yes—Freemasonry—the Irish——”

“Those are mushrooms,” Smyth remarked, his lips giving out a trickle of thick cigar-smoke, languid as himself; while Crooks smoked a briar pipe.

“What! Freemasonry a mushroom?”—from Crooks—“on the contrary
_____”

“Comparatively, of course, I meant. And I don’t call those secret societies, of whose existence and objects everyone knows. Where’s the secrecy?... But there are others.”

Crooks bent forward. He knew that Smyth was Cockney, as much a thing of London as was Charles Lamb, sometimes burrowing in some Slav night-club at the docks, or among “Ye Merrie Men,” when supposed to be at holiday in Homburg, a being deeply initiated into London lore, knowing somewhat more behind those eyebrows of mild surprise than he ever mentioned at table: hence Crooks’ interest; and his interest, like his other emotions, was usually shown.

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“But in London?” he said: “really, now? Why have I never dropped across them? In Paris, yes—”

Smyth answered—his taciturnity sometimes melted when the subject was London—“Paris is to London as a shilling dictionary to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Everything’s in London.”

“Except Paris”—from Crooks.

“Paris is, too: I could take you to the Bal Bullier within half-a-mile of here. Only, in Paris it has name and fame, in London it is lost.”

“But this ‘Rose’ business—‘secret societies’—you assure me they’re a fact?”

“I am a member of two; I know of a third; and have suspicions of a fourth.” Smyth laughed a little to himself.

“That’s three, say”—Crooks had animated eyes —“now, tell me how I can join them all!”

Smyth chuckled inwardly at this crude enthusiasm; and he said: “You don’t seem quite to realise—they are *secret* societies. There are more multi-millionaires—more experts in Becquerel rays—than members. To become a member of those I know is about as rare a thing as the conjunction of four planets; and requires long preparation. You can’t go about ‘joining them’ like that. One of them has consisted of sixteen members since the time of Edward II, another of twenty-three—”

“But what are they *for*?” Crooks fretfully cried: “what’s—what’s their *motif*, their *idea*?”

“Different *motifs*. Most are benevolent, I think. All mystic.”

"Then, why on earth are they secret, if they are benevolent?" Crooks peered piercingly into it with

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the interest of the perplexed busybody: "the mere fact that they are benevolent—"

"Different reasons for secrecy: some are secret to avoid—hanging sometimes." Smyth showed his teeth in a silent laugh.

"Then, I don't tumble," from Crooks—"why need they avoid hanging, if they are benevolent?"

"Seems fairly obvious to me," Smyth remarked, his straining lids half-shut behind his *pince-nez*: "there are three types of really secret societies—absurd, obscene, and benevolent: and the benevolent ones can only be created for one reason—because Government, so far, is immature and defective. They assist Government by taking the law into their own hands, executing justice, doing good, in cases where Government can't, or won't, yet do it, and calling upon God to witness in a mystic mood."

"Oho! Is that it? Then, they have my approval. And as to these 'Friends of the Rose', tell me the particular——"

"It was a bad day for me," Smyth interrupted, "when I mentioned to you 'Friends of the Rose', for you have left me no peace since. What business is it of yours? And what can you expect me to tell? Does the great Crooks take it for granted that secrets guarded six centuries will be blabbed to him for the asking? You may be perfectly certain, for instance, that 'Friends of the Rose' is not really their name—though it is not unlike that. What can one tell? Perhaps I may tell that the membership has always been limited to sixteen; or I may tell that there is a certain apartment somewhere in London of whose existence only one man at a time

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—occasionally two—has known for five hundred years."

Crooks winked quick, hearing it: then threw his face about, frowning, fretted, almost offended, for he disliked being "out of" anything. "Apartment," he muttered... "And who is that one man who knows?"

"The Primate of the Society."

"Primate..." Crooks meditated it over the fire: then animatedly looked up to ask: "Now, where can that apartment be?"

On which Smyth, tickled, let himself go into a sort of laugh, saying: “What, want to take a lady there? I am sorry I can’t tell you, if only because I have no notion myself. But when the Primate dies—he is a very old man—lives in Camden Town—I shall know.”

“Oh, *you’ll* be Primate then?”

Smyth’s lids lay closed. He made no answer.

“I should just like half-an-hour’s interview with that ‘very old man who lives in Camden Town’,” Crooks mentioned.

And Smyth answered: “If you saw him hobbling along Gray’s Inn Road, it would not occur to you to glance twice at him. London is like that. We brush shoulders with angels at Charing Cross, little divining the depths that some common-looking type has dived, the oddity of his destiny, his store of lore, his giftedness, or the dignity on his head. I know an old pattern-maker in Wapping—”

But at this point Minna came in, and, as Crooks’ attention was drawn off, Smyth suddenly stopped.

That was a Wednesday.

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Now, on Fridays Smyth invariably left his office an hour earlier, dined at home, locked himself in his book-room for two hours, and then went out dumb, like monks, not to come back till the morning hours.

Years had seen no break in this routine; but this Friday there was a break: for, for some unknown reason, Smyth was back at home before eleven.

In Victoria Street he glanced up at his windows on the second floor; noticed that the drawing-room light seemed low behind the blinds; and muttered something to himself.

He then went up by the lift, opened the flat-door with his key—and did it noiselessly, though he was *far* from admitting to himself that he did it noiselessly. He now glanced into the kitchen, and his eyebrows went higher because of the fact that it was in darkness. He passed, on padded carpet, to two other rooms—no one there: the servants had perhaps gone to the theatre. He then stepped down a passage to the drawing-room door, and, still without sound, turned the handle. But that door was locked: and his eyebrows went higher still.

Standing there, he seemed to come to a sudden decision: and walked sharply, softly, out of the flat.

Down below he stepped into a by-street where there is a Police-Ambulance cot; and, standing in the shadow of this, looking toward Victoria Street, he waited.

After half-an-hour he saw Crooks come out of his "Mansion," saw him walk away with quite an air of jauntiness; and presently saw his drawing-room lights turned on full.

He slept at the Hôtel Victoria that night; and the

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next morning turned up at Covent House the same cold Smyth as ever—made a jest with the lift-man, going up to his office; and his sub-editor did not dream that day what was in him, nor that its name was Legion.

But in the afternoon his sister Minna, who had spent a day of wonderment and trembling, received a note "by hand" from him:

"Dear Minna,

"I regret that reasons have arisen which make it impossible for us to live any longer together. Pray write me by to-morrow whether you desire to stay on at the flat, or would rather that I took another for you.

"Yours,

"Crichton."

So they parted...

She, knowing that he was attached to the flat, left it for one in Maida Vale, he settling an income upon her. From that night of the lowered lights he did not see her again—not for an instant. To her prayers for an explanation he made no answer.

But his pain proved more than he had bargained for, and he would have done better to have left those rooms which had known her presence. Though not very visible to others, there was a friendship and link between them extremely sacred and sweet; and he pretty soon discovered that, in sending her away, he had plucked out his right eye. Sometimes for days now he would absent himself from the office; his thin, palish face went pinched and paler; some

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grey began to mingle with his hair; his taciturnity turned to something like dumbness.

But he never relented; until, after six months, it came to his ears, through a doctor, that she was not well, and in a tragic fix. And then he wrote to her:

“Dear Minna,

“I know everything: and whatever there is to forgive I forgive. Please, dear, come back to my arms.

“Yours,

“Crichton.”

She would not at first; but then the wings of love proved stronger than her shrinkings: and she took herself back to the old flat.

But she was not well: for she, too, had rued and gnashed, chewing the ashes of the fire of passion; so that daily he saw her vanishing like a shadow from him; and in a month she sighed at him, and died, leaving him a little girl to nurse.

As for Crooks, he was at Naples, and it was three months before he had definite knowledge that a child was born, a mother dead. Then he asserted himself. Since that Friday night of Smyth’s earlier return he had had no interview with Smyth, for Minna, as it were on her knees, had ever pleaded with him, “Please, please, try not to meet Crichton!” But now Crooks asserted himself.

He sought out Smyth one night at the Savage, and, standing before Smyth’s chair, said: “Smyth, I must have the child.”

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Smyth looked up from the slightly surprising thing in his *Standard* to the slightly surprising object before him, and said: “No.”

“Then, I have to see her sometimes—fair’s fair.”

“If you like,” Smyth muttered. “She is at my flat. Try not to see her often”—he read again.

So Crooks went and revolved philosophic thoughts over the insignificant stick of womanhood, that one could push into a jug: and she exclaimed on seeing his fat face, with hair stuck on it.

Then twice a month he went; and once, when, on meeting Smyth in Smyth’s hall, he put out his hand, Smyth, with his eyebrows on high, let his long fingers be shaken. (Smyth, in fact, never participated in a hand-shake with any child of Adam, simply permitted and witnessed it, with surprise).

And when this had happened several times in the course of a year, one night found Crooks seated by the fire, the child on his knee, over against Smyth, as of old. Without greatly caring, he had set himself to be friends again with Smyth, doing it in a patronising mood, and so caring nothing for Smyth's surprise—nor, in truth, could he be sure that Smyth was more surprised than usual, since Smyth was for ever surprised. Moreover, Crooks' fame had lately swelled and mellowed; if he had an opinion on this or that matter, that was put into the newspapers; and he was puffed up, the fact being that the little men of his trade and grain have no essential self, nor impregnable self-estimation, which cannot be raised at all by any applause, nor depressed at all by any dispraise: but when the wind blows they are big, and when the wind lulls they are little. As for

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Crooks, at this time he felt that his presence honoured inventors and sceptics.

And "Cluck, cluck," he went, cantering his chick on his knee with a gee-up cackling; then: "I say, Smyth, did you ever become Primate of that Rose Society?"

"Yes," Smyth replied with surprise.

"Ah, you did. So *you* have the secret now of that mysterious 'Apartment'?"

"Yes," Smyth replied with surprise.

"Then," says Crooks to himself, "I shall *set foot* in that apartment sooner or later and he sat an hour with Smyth.

In this sort of relation they coexisted, until the midget Minna, fair and frail like its mother, could crawl, could walk, the months for mourning now long over, though Crichton Smyth still dressed in raiment of the raven—crape never more to leave that sleeve of his. Every Sunday sun-down found him in the Brompton Cemetery moping over a tomb; and most who saw him thought him cold; but some thought not. Meantime, Crooks came fairly regularly to the flat; and he said one night by the fire: "I shall leave off coming here, Smyth, if you don't talk to me. I have assumed that there can be no resentment left, since you realise that I loved Minna." Smyth's lips oozed smoke a minute; then: "How many others did you love that year?"

"Several perhaps. I consider the question irrelevant——"

"How many have you loved since?"

"Several—many, perhaps. That is quite outside——"

"You are married

"Yes, but I am impatient of argument on the subject, Smyth. It simply means that your views on sex-relations are different from mine; and, as mine are the offspring of thought——"

"I am not 'arguing'"—from Smyth with sleep-loaded lids: "it is not a question of anyone's 'views'. I merely said that you are married, and it is a fact that, if a married man lets himself love a girl of the middle class, he runs a risk of killing her with shame. I do not say that it ought to be so—I am not arguing—I only state, what you know, that it *is* so—at present; and when a death occurs, you get murder. Of course, there is no law against it, but——" He stopped, passing his palm lazily across his raised forehead, his lids closed down, straining to open.

"Men are not exactly angels," Crooks remarked.

"More like devils, some"—a mutter.

"Not referring to poor me?"

"Your existence seems to do a good deal of harm. I don't know that you do any good."

"You don't know that my books do good?"

"No, I don't know. I know that men are already getting past 'novels' without novelty, and that as soon as women cease to be children the last 'novel' will be written. Yours are entertaining, I believe ——"

"Not prophetic? Not vital?"

This tickled three of Smyth's ribs on the right side, and he let out on a breath of disdain: "Lot of Simple-Simons we still are."

Now Crooks flushed a little, with "That's right, Smyth, tell me about him!"

"Well, possibly you do some good," Smyth drowsily droned: "I have read a page of yours of which I said 'this is noble-minded Your sympathies are generous, and since your crudity suits the public, you may do some good. But sympathies without intellect can't do much, and you are not an intellect—never had a thought that was new and true, those of your notions that can be called your own being ridiculous. You know a little science in an amateur way—perhaps half as much as I know, which is hardly much—not half enough to have trained your brain to hardness and sharpness. And

your manner of expression—your flourish and flood—I always have the feeling that you can't get over your gush of exultancy at the surprise of finding yourself a writer instead of vending ginger-beer. Not that you are really a writer—”

“Oh, Smyth, not even a writer now, old E.P.”—from Crooks, with mockery.

“Of course not”—drowsily from Smyth: “a writer is a literateur, a man of letters, not of words, not wordy. I would bet that you couldn't even give a hardheaded definition of what writing *is*, what art *is*, any definition not wide of the simple truth. Don't you understand? we have two means of expressing ourselves—the tongue, the pen; and these two readily interchange their functions: we can write with the tongue, as when Demosthenes uttered his orations, or we can talk with the pen—like you. You tell your tales—don't write them. It is as if you related them to an audience, your books being

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the shorthand-man's report of what you said: and any one of a thousand other crowds of words would do as passably as your crowd does. The Writer's different: doesn't do it to get money—sure to have some money somehow, he's such a nimble lucky being—doesn't do it to get anything, but to give himself, and to rid his glands a bit of the richness of the fat of his genius: so that *his* pen is not a tongue, but a burin—writes in granite—every word, every letter, pregnant with rhyme and reason, with singing and seeing; and the proof that *you* are not a writer is the volume of your vomit—and then its popularity, since it satisfies the public's demand for a certain commonness and counter-jumper familiarity, hardly possible to any man whose father was a gentleman, and for a deluge of wordiness: compare your two shelves of so-called ‘books’ with Homer's one or two, with Milton's, Flaubert's, Pater's, Plato's, Réné Maran's: it would be quite impossible to *write* in one life-time a quarter of all that froth of ginger-beer. So you are still a vendor of ginger-beer more than a writer, for——” But at this statement the little maid commenced to lament, and Crooks, handing her to her nurse, kissed her head, murmuring: “I'll go.”

But, half-way to the door, he turned to say: “What about that ‘Apartment’ of yours, Smyth, that I am to be taken to? You said you'd consider it.”

Smyth's answer was a little singular. With a push of the lips, pettish, yet mixed with a smile, he said: "Oh, you keep on about that!"

This was the *sixth* time that Crooks had asked—

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Smyth knew the number. At the first asking a flush of offence had touched Smyth's forehead at the cocky pushfulness that could prick Crooks to make such a request. But since then Smyth had begun to answer with a certain demur, a flirting reluctance, as of a girl who murmurs "no," but blushes "yes."

"*Oh, you keep on about that...*"

"Where's the harm?" asked Crooks on his next visit—"provided you can absolutely rely upon my lifelong silence. My curiosity, of course, is intrinsically *literary*. Energize my imagination with an actual sight of the place, and I tell you what—I'll do a series of mystery-stories, and *The Westminster* shall have 'em."

And Smyth, his lids closed but for a slit that rested on Crooks, answered: "Ah, Crooks, don't tempt me."

It was, then, a question of temptation now? Crooks felt exultation. Had not the sister yielded to his tempting? The brother should be his conquest, too...

But on the next occasion of Smyth's temptation, Smyth said with a laugh: "You don't apparently care whether you urge me to the breach of a vow of office! And you do it with that same facile callousness with which you break your own marriage-vow."

"Smyth, you will not do as a conscience—you are too pale," said Crooks. "Please leave our evil marriage-customs out of the discussion. As to your 'vow of office', did you not yourself tell me that sometimes *two* men have known the alleged 'Apartment'?"

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"Well, yes, I think I did say so. And yon conceive, do you, that *you* have a right to be one of the two? Well, perhaps you have—I'll look into the question. But, if ever I do take you, I hope you are not nervous."

"Fancy a nervous E. P. Crooks! What is there to see, then?"

"It is a little—lethal."

"Then, I'm the man. But when?"

"I haven't said yes. Give one time. I have to get the approval of others..."

But only three weeks afterwards Smyth yielded. "Very well," he said: "you shall see it; the thing's settled; your imagination shall be 'energized', as you call it. But you are not permitted to know *where* the room is: you have to go to it blindfold. And, by the way, you must go disguised: just hang a beard round your ears—that'll do. And be before the Temple Church on Tuesday night, to hear the Law Courts clock strike eleven."

"*Fiet!*" Crooks cried.

That Tuesday night in October a high wind blew, and by the light of a moon that flew to encounter flying troops of cloud, Crooks stood looking at those eight old tombs, and the circular west-end of the church. The Strand river had thinned now to a trickle of feet; in there in the secrecy of the Inn not a step passed; and Crooks felt upon him the mood of adventure: London was partly Baghdad; this an Arabian night: some time or other he'd make "copy" of the mood of it. To be disguised, too, was quite novel to him; anon he pawed his false beard with a mock pomposity; then he had the

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thought: "But why, after all, the disguise?" and just then eleven struck.

At its last stroke a step was on the pavers, and Crichton Smyth with his crape and raven dress was there. He put finger to lip when Crooks began to say something, beckoned, and Crooks followed out through Hare Court, by Middle Temple Lane, past the under-porter's lodge; when Smyth got into a coupé brougham waiting by the Griffin, Crooks followed in.

"I must blindfold you here," Smyth said at his ear.

"There remains the inward eye"—from Crooks: "blindfold away."

At once Smyth produced two pads of black cotton, and a black ribbon that had two narrower ribbons sewed to its ends; cottons and ribbon he tied over Crooks' eyes and nose: and now it could be seen that the broad ribbon had crimson borders, and three roses embroidered on it.

As soon as it was secured, Smyth, unknown to Crooks, slipped a strip of brass-plate inside the band of Crooks' bowler-hat—a brass-plate on which were etched the words: "Edgar Crichton Smyth, P.." Whereupon the driver, as if he had waited for all this, went forward without being ordered.

But Crooks understood that they were going eastward. He heard Bennett's Clock quite near above strike the quarter-past. And presently the following words were uttered within that brougham:

CROOKS: Talk to me. I am lost in darkness. Silence must be awful to the blind.

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SMYTH: I don't want to talk. This is not a night like every night for you and me.

CROOKS: You think something of that 'Apartment' of yours!

SMYTH: It is not an Apartment with 'To Let' in the window. It has no window. I hope you have said your prayers.

CROOKS: Men of my birth have no need to say prayers, Smyth. Behind and underneath we are essentially religious; and our existence, properly understood, is a prayer.

SMYTH: Good thing you are religious behind.

CROOKS: Did you not *know* that I am?

SMYTH: No, how was I to know? You aren't where one sees you.

CROOKS: Smyth, you are the most——

SMYTH: Don't chatter.

Here Crooks could hear a tram droning somewhere through the humdrum plod-clap, plod-clap, of the brougham-horse's hoofs on asphalt; he thought to himself: "We must be somewhere in Whitechapel;" and presently they spoke again:

CROOKS: Is it far now?

SMYTH: Ten minutes.

CROOKS: I don't like the blindfolding, though—and, by the way, what is the disguise for? I understand the blindfold, but *why* the disguise?

SMYTH: You will soon guess why.

CROOKS: Your disguise is a mystery, and your blindfolding a plague. Ah, it must be sad to be blind!

SMYTH: What about being dead?

CROOKS: The dead don't know that they are blind, but the blind know that they are dead. Oh, it is

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a great thing to see the sun! to be alive, and see it. People don't realise, because the universe is not meant for men to see, but for the lords of older orbs than this to cast down their crowns before. To-morrow morning when I have back my sight, I shall build me an altar.

SMYTH: Don't make any vows at it.

CROOKS: Certainly, Smyth, you are the most surly and cynical——

SMYTH: We get out here.

On this the brougham, without order, stopped; Smith, having got out, led out Crooks; and, without order, the brougham rolled away.

As it had made several turnings, Crooks did not know in what district of London he now was—knew that it was East. But no sound of foot-falls passing here: only, he could hear a rush of machinery going on somewhere.

“Those are alternators driven by steam-turbine,” he said. “But are we in a street?”

“Sh-h, don’t talk,” said Smyth.

Crooks next felt himself led by the hand over what seemed to be cobble-stones, where the feet echoed, and there was a draught, so that he thought he must be under some tunnel, or vault. Then he felt himself in the open again, still going over old cobble-stones; and still the thump and rush of machinery reached the ear from somewhere. As for Smyth, he uttered not a word, and would listen to none.

Then there was a stoppage: Crooks knew that a door was being unlocked: he was led up two steps; the door was relocked. And, hearing now a click at

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his ear, he could guess that Smyth had switched on the light of a torch.

He was next led over bare boards in some place that had a smell of soap and candles, tar and benzoline; and twice his steps tripped over what seemed to be empty bags. Then he was led slowly down some board steps; at the bottom of which Smyth stooped to unlock something—apparently a trapdoor in the ground.

Through this Crooks was led down, Smyth now saying to him: “Hold my jacket; these steps are narrow”—and Crooks went down some steep steps of stone, each step a jolt, where he ceased to hear the beat of the machinery.

After this he passed through a passage, apparently of hardened marl, markedly damp and clammy, and uneven to the feet, where even sightless eyes could see and feel the thickness of the darkness; at the far end of which Smyth was again known to open some door—evidently a very heavy one—whose lock gnashed at the key, whose hinges chattered. From which point Crooks was led up steps so narrow, that he could easily feel the wall on either hand, they going now in single file.

To these steps there seemed no end—up and still up; and soon Crooks was afresh conscious of the throb and thresh of steam-machinery, jumbled with the hum of generators making their jews-harp music: this business and to-do seeming to increase on the ear, and then, as still up they climbed, seeming to die away. Whenever they came to a landing or passage, Crooks, who was fat, and panted, said to himself “at last;” but several times he had to

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recommence the climb; and he thought to himself: “Can it be the Tower of London? We are in some tower, within the thickness of the wall;” but he did not say anything: a mood of utter dumbness had come upon him.

At last, in moving along a passage over stone floor, he being then in front of Smyth, he stumbled, apparently in dust or rubbish; the next moment he was stopped, butting upon wall; and “Hallo,” said he, “what’s this?”

There was no reply...

Waiting against the wall for guidance, Crooks was conscious of a clang behind him, as of a massive portal slammed, and of the croak of a rusty lock being coaxed by a key. Then he was aware of a scraping, as if a ponderous object was being dragged across the corridor; and simultaneously he was aware of an odour under his nose.

“Smyth!” he called out: “are we there?”

There was no reply...

Now he was aware of a match being struck, then of another, and another. By this time his bones were as cold as the stones that enclosed him.

He suddenly cried out: “Smyth! I am going to take the bandage off!”

Still there was no answer: but some moments afterwards there burst out upon his startled heart a most bizarre noise, a babbling, or lalling, half-talk, half-song, in some unknown tongue—from Smyth. The next instant Crooks had the bandage snatched from his eyes.

There was light—a pink light—brilliant at first to him; and by it he instantly realised that he was

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interned. He stood in a room of untooled ashlar some fourteen feet square, with a doorway three feet wide looking down a corridor three feet wide. It was the door of this doorway that had been slammed; but he could still look

out, since the door had a hole in its iron—a hole Gothic in shape like the door itself; and outside the door stood an old pricket-candlestick of iron supporting seven candles, all alight, higher than a man's head, occupying all the breadth of the corridor.

Crooks understood that that scraping sound he had heard must have been due to the placing of the candlestick in position, and that the striking of the matches had been for lighting the seven candles, each of which had, before and behind it, a screen of pink porcelain with a pattern of roses—two perpendicular rows of roses—so that, as the candles got lower, they would still glow through a rose.

All this he noticed in some moments; also that there was a hand-bag open on the floor, out of which he assumed that Smyth had got the sort of linen amice, dotted with roses, which he now wore round his shoulders; moreover, in some moments it had entered his consciousness that the dust and rubbish into which he had stumbled was made of the bones and dust and clothes of men who had ended their days there; moreover, he noticed that, hanging before the hole in the portal, was an old Toledo *puñal* of damascened steel, and he understood that this was mercifully meant for his use against himself, if he so chose. If he had doubted this—if he had cherished a hope—it would have vanished when he saw what was hanging on the shaft of the candlestick—

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a bit of ebony, or black marble, on which had been scribbled in red pencil:

MINNA AND FOUR OTHERS.

But what most froze the current of Crook's blood was the horrid comedy of Smyth's psalmodying and dancing in his amice a yard beyond the candles, like one putting forth a spell of "woven paces and of waving hands," his head cast back, his gaze on Heaven—his pince-nez on his nose! But in what occult Chaldæan was that bleating to Moloch and Baal that his tongue baa'd and bleated? Crooks knew some languages: but this recitative had no affinity with any speech of men which he had ever conceived; and then that antic fandango-tangle of writhing palms and twining thighs that went on with the psalming, like some entranced wight steadily treading the treadmill of dance in the land of the tarantula—a piece of witchcraft as antique and aboriginal as torch-lit orgies of Sheba and Egypt... His throat

straining out of the hole—‘his eyes straining out of his head—Crooks sent out to that dread dancer the whisper: “*Smyth, don’t do it, Smyth...*”

He might as well have whispered to the dust and ashes in which he stood.

After three minutes the ritual ceased: Smyth stood another minute, his brow bowed down, with muttering mouth; then took off and put the amice into a hand-bag; picked up and put on his hat; and, without speaking, went away, leaving the candles watching there, as for a wake.

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When this tale had been told general clapping broke out, as was only natural, since it was Hardacre’s tale, Tom Bates on the slabs banging obstinately away, Joy’s Aunt Anne hastening to shake Hardacre’s hand... in the midst of which Miss Clode of the Conservatoire whispered to Middle. Marie Gorky, the painter of dogs: “Joy, see, is clapping, too—for the second time: a *ba’ad* sign for our tale-teller, if I know her.”

“I do not see that,” the other rejoined, “since Joy is ever sincere, and clapping is a sign of pleasure.”

“A public sign, yes: but for the real menacer of her maidenhood it is her heart that has clapped, or will, and her palms—” but she was interrupted by Lady Sartory who now exclaimed: “Only, so many unhappy endings!”

And then Joy spoke: “That is not complimentary, Aunt!”

Upon which Mons. Pascal, the novelist, asked her: “Is it, then, uncomplimentary to say of a talc that it ends unhappily?”

“Surely,” she answered: “doesn’t every good tale end happily?”—and she was always so stingy of her criticism, that this outspokenness set up a hush of interest round her.

“Oh, Joy,” her Aunt Anne said, “many people differ from you there.”

“They must not,” Joy answered with a bent face faintly flushed, “since it is not a question of taste,

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but of fact. *Good is truth*: good tale is true tale?: and since the truth is that Life ends happily, so must the tale. The deinosaur sighed and died out, the pterodactyl sank in tragedy, but in the end Man and Bird emerged to trill

hymns of victory; and the endings still to come of the Tale will doubtless be happier still. Though He slay *me*, yet will I trust in Him! This is *The* fact about Life, that there is a happy issue out of all its afflictions: so this is *The* theme and emotion of each good tale... What else can be worth the telling?"

"How the blind see!" Fragson cried out, and clapped his fingers.

But Mons. Pascal had a perplexed forehead, and he asked her: "Do you say, then, that there are no good tragedy-tales—'Othello'—'Romeo and Juliet'...?"

To this Joy answered: "'Othello' I call a poor tale, since, ending unhappily, it tells no God's-truth, is a private trouble, a storm-in-a-teacup, its kite hitched to no star; but 'Romeo and Juliet' I call an excellent tale. For aren't there two kinds of happy endings? endings that are happy for the characters, and then—a still better kind—endings that are happy for Society, for Life, for the reader. The best tale ever told is, of course, 'the old, old story' of Jesus Christ, best because truest, truest because having *both* sorts of happy endings, both *in excelsis*. The hero actually dies, but the nimble being—rises again! and lives happily in a *Heaven* ever after. As for the second sort of happy ending, a *world* is redeemed! *this* world in which the reader is. Not that it is difficult to invent such tales: the difficulty

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is to get the details credited, so that the tale may not be a fairy-tale; and in ages when the details of this deeply true tale could be credited it is not strange that it inspired an even wild affection: men died for it. As to 'Romeo and Juliet' that, too, has the second sort of happy ending: for that Montague-Capulet feud, that so wounded the State, was reconciled over the lovers' graves—nor could anything but that *one* tricky plot of incidents have reconciled it. And this is true to Life—is the tricky history of the deinosaur, of Life, trickily crushed into a nut-shell: tragedy, yes, terrible, pitiful; but there's a happy issue out of all that affliction: happy and tricky: a plot contrived by a Divine trickiness; and in the end we see that the affliction was worth while, that God was right after all, and was as tricky a plotter as ever, since the blessing immensely outweighs the bale: which is what every true and tricky tale tells in its own new way."

Then Pascal: "'True and tricky'—are they sisters?"

And Joy: "They are twins, I think. 'By wit He seated the earth, and He fastened the Heavens with trickiness'. So, if the tale is not tricky, it is not

true, and, if it is not true, it is not really tricky: for consider—" But now music broke out for Mddle. Dalas, the quick-sketcher, who with dashes of charcoal sketched portraits and buffooneries to music with an arm dancingly agitated, wrenching fickly a layer of paper from the easel the instant each sketch was finished, as one fickly knocks away toy-blocks, and castles of sand.

CHAPTER IX

THE next was a day of restlessness and whisperings, since it was Fragson's day, and the girls kept pointing furtive glances toward Joy's face, who, for her share, gave no sign that she felt it a day unlike other days. The forenoon was spent by the men in shooting woodcock, the most energetic among them being Tom Bates, who, nevertheless, could not shoot, but shot at a run one-handedly, the gun held out gawkily anyhow—like Nelson! Then Joy and her court of damsels joined them for luncheon among the rocks of a quarry in the heart of the park; and when they had picnicked within thicket there, and had got back to the Castle, they began to go down to the grotto long before the ordinary time, as theatre-goers are betimes at the doors on a souvenir and benefit day. All were within and waiting, the hour now come, before Joy entered, convoyed by her Aunt and Tom Bates, she, as she took her seat by the balcony overlooking the sea, begging to be forgiven for being late. Fragson, meantime, was chatting easily with Sir John Hay, Member of Parliament for the East Cumberland Division; but presently, seeing that nearly everyone sat tacit and expecting, he got up to stand at ease against a column of the grotto, in the centre, near the well: whereupon every eye directed itself toward the blind girl's face, which she had averted toward

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the harbour, but not so much averted that she could not be remarked to go ghost-pallid an instant the instant that Fragson began. He, fingering his beard-tips, peering forth cœgiped beneath his V-shaped pair of brows that frowned, and had a pattern graven in them like Redgauntlet, then went on to tell the tale which he called

THE CORNER IN COTTON.

To three men seated on a balcony some waltzing-couples floated anon into view, bobbing on the waves of a music which floated them rotating over the floor of an ocean of ball-room, whose wall-surface was vaulted by arches disparting large slabs of alabaster; while yonder in the valley the eye

could catch in the sky the chimneys of Sodham, and the smoke of its torment, like dawn in Tophet.

There had been *four* on the balcony, but one of them—Mr. Ponting of oil—had moved off into the ball-room; and said Sir Thomas Saunders of cotton, who was the lord of Sodham: “What’s wrong with Ponting of late? Breaking-up, may be? Looks older...”

“Ah, you have noticed,” muttered Lord Baseling of beer.

The third man, Mr. Cummings King Monk, a man of more millions than words, said nothing, his gaze given up to his *verni* shoe, whose glitter finished off his length of elegant leg. He, princeliest of the three princes here, was not a prince of trade—had inherited revenues laid up for accumulation by a Jew of Nürnberg, and was believed, indeed, to have a strain

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of the Hebrew in his veins, though no trace of it appeared in that grimly English face graven out of granite, or in the gaze of those grey eyes which watched the world like a cat.

The cigars of the millionaires glowed in silence; until Baseling of beer opened his lips to say: “Now, I’ll tell you something about Ponting—something particularly dicky—since you don’t seem to know. Four weeks ago he—disappeared from everybody: six days; I happen to know—funny—mhm. Heaven knows where to—says he went incognito to France. But there are things which a man, about to fly off, hardly omits to do—telephones—writes a note—mhm—that sort of thing. Not Ponting: disappeared like Moses—Wall Street screaming cables after him—wife anxious—and so on. When he turned up afresh, he was as you see him now—aged, chastened, pensive, yet lighter somehow—mixed—mhm—very funny. Now, I’ll tell you something else. Ponting has been in England four months; and one day two months ago he shewed me a document that had been sent him—funny stuff—made one laugh, and yet—mhm—rather haunted; type-written; at the top of it—staring, red, raised—the letters ‘S.S.R.S.R.’——”

At those letters Sir Thomas Saunders started...

“What ‘S.S.R.S.R.’ may mean I still—have no idea,” Lord Baseling continued: “have asked Ponting if he ever discovered—said no—or the shape of his lips did, though their colour rather said yes, I fancied. As to the document itself, odd stuff—mhm—unEnglish—distinctly. Numbered stuff

—1, 2, 3: 1, It is suggested to you not to do this; 2, It is suggested to you to do that—unEnglish—shewing

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quite an inside acquaintance with Ponting's operations, and with Oil in general——”

At this Sir Thomas Saunders' palm went sweeping down his length of wheaten beard that helped to make his buccaneer handsomeness, as he muttered: “Infamous thing! Think of the insolence of such an abuse of the penny-post! By heaven, if I were to discover that such a gang of ruffians does actually exist in this country, I'd take it upon me to have them hanged ——”

“*There's* the Saunders ‘Thorough’ for you,” remarked Lord Baseling, “where all the oof comes from—mhm—what? But taking the thing more coolly——”

“My dear sir”—Sir Thomas cast away his cigar—“I have cause to be indignant, for I have myself this day got a document with those letters ‘S.S.R.S.R.’—”

“Ah?” came from Mr. Monk, who was smiling upward at his smoke-rings.

“Come, that's of some interest,” breathed Lord Baseling, leaning rather forward.

“I'll tell you,” Sir Thomas said... “Some three weeks ago, as I gather, there appeared in Sodham—a man. Workman—apparently; got a job at Routledge's; striking-looking type—young man, hairy, fair—handsome brute—looks as if he'd stepped down out of some picture of Jesus Christ by Raphael—‘but bigger type, hairier face. I had noticed him some time ago—couldn't help—rough brown cloak of bauge with a hood—broad hat—very incongruous with his clogs clattering about the town. *I* should have thought that the men would have thrown things

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at him; but they don't seem to have—call him Christ! for I heard some of them crying out, “ere cooms old J.C.”, not meaning Joe Chamberlain of the single eye-glass, but Another, who said ‘if thine eye be single, pluck it out’... Well, this man appeared before me this forenoon in my private office—can't imagine how he managed, but there he was; and what did he want? wanted me to take back a foreman named Davis who has been

dismissed from Bread Street Mill for mixing in politics—sort of Communist, though he knew I won't have that about the place. Well, my man in his Inverness and clogs calmly seats himself, sighs, states his business—‘take back Davis’. ‘Who on earth are you?’ I asked him. ‘I am a workman at Routledge's, Sir’, he says. ‘You don't talk like it’, I said, ‘tell the truth—who are you?’ ‘My name’, says he with his eyes cast down, ‘is Pember, Sir’. ‘Your name's of no consequence’, I said laughing—for I couldn't be very angry, his manner was so meek—has a way of veiling his eyes with the lids—‘but you'll admit’, I said, ‘that this is sufficiently cheeky of you?’ ‘Take him back this day!’ says my man, patting his knee impatiently, ‘the man and his family are starving’. ‘Well, but they rather deserve to starve’, I said. ‘Yes, and *I* deserve, and *you*’, says my fellow, fixing a look on me. ‘People must mind what they are about’, I told him, ‘then they won't starve’. ‘Take him back this day!—he slapped my table—‘believe me, you will find it one of your most paying deals’. ‘Oh, you go, make haste’, I then said to him; on which he threw a foolscap envelope upon my table, saying, ‘You might look

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through that some time Then he paced away, but stopped at the door, shook his bush at me, and said bitterly, ‘Ah, Saunders, your sins are many My sins...!’

“But the envelope?”—from Lord’ Baseling, obviously interested: “did you——?”

“Yes, I opened the thing. There were those letters, ‘S.S.R.S.R.’, and it was ‘suggested’ to me— No more J.C. in Sodham after this week!”

“But will the fellow go when bidden?” Mr. Cummings Monk now opened his lips to ask, staring straight at Sir Thomas Saunders with that unblinking blankness of the sphinx in his cat's-eyes: “you have spoken of the man's ‘meekness’ of manner, but the impression I get is not that it is the meekness of a menial, but of manhood rather, of a mastery calmly masterful. And suppose there is really a ‘gang’, as you fancy, and that that ‘gang’ had something to do with Ponting's disappearance: think in that case of the significance of the fact that Ponting seems to be screening them, so great and grave the impression they have left on him. Perhaps it might be better to avoid provoking a conflict——”

At this Sir Thomas looked reproach at Mr. Monk, breathing after him: “Provoke a conflict... conflict with rats and pests——”

"We can only call them pests when we know something more about them," Mr. Monk coldly answered: "what is it they are after? Money? What was '*suggested*' to you in this 'S.S.R.S.R.' document?—if one may ask?"

Sir Thomas rather hesitated before he answered. "Well, the writer seemed to know—yet how *could*

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he?—well, you both know—no secret between us three here—seemed to know that I am in with the six Americans in cornering cotton this winter: and it was '*suggested*' to me that I withdrew from the deal; and it was '*suggested*' that I reopen the two mills to relieve distress; and it was '*suggested*' that I am not to think of representing Sodham in Parliament
_____”

"Drastic!"—from Lord Baseling, with rather a forced laugh.

"Wait—I'll get to the bottom of it, I'll do the suggesting," Sir Thomas said with that pressure of his thick lips which had made him rich.

Mr. Monk was yawning; and he said: "But stay: their aims don't seem to be the getting of pelf——"

"Gang of ruffians!" Sir Thomas grumbled with an anger that ran in a stream down his beard.

"Personally, I confess," remarked those cold tones of Mr. Monk, "I cannot quite see the ruffianism. We know that, as a matter of fact, the wealth of nations is not yet beneficially distributed; and we agree that it is the business of Government to distribute it ever more beneficially. Possibly in some future century this may be completely done: but, of course, Government, like other organic things, grows from an infancy, or, like other inventions, develops by stages. The first steam-boat (Papin's) was away back in Milton's life-time; but it could not limp so far in a day as the 'Lucania' flits in a minute. So with Government in its present infancy—wishing to distribute wealth beneficially, but with the tottery knees of weanlings wishing to toddle. It already knows *how* to, but it can't: too many

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uneducated wills intervene at random, this being still the age of private enterprise. Even our Post-Office was recently an affair of private enterprise, as are still hospitals, travel, and so on. Think of that curious society called 'Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children'—how rude the nation in

which such prevention is necessary, in which, if it is necessary, Government requires the aid of private enterprise—is still so weak-kneed and young. So, if a private society of citizens, in an age of private enterprise, undertook to help Government to distribute wealth a little beneficially, and redress some of the wrongs inflicted by the random wills of private enterprise, that would be in the fashion—nothing unusual there.”

Lord Baseling laughed. “Oh, come, that’s heresy in a multimillionaire like Mr. Monk!”

“It is extraordinary, though,” Mr. Monk answered, with a touch of harshness in his hard voice, “that because a man happens to be a multimillionaire, he should be assumed to be a fool, and to imagine that multimillionaires ought to be. We ought to have got past that, Lord Baseling.”

“But—I can’t believe my ears!” Sir Thomas said to the four winds: “*which ‘wrongs inflicted’...?* I don’t admit any! If Tom has more brains than Dick, shouldn’t Tom have more wealth? Where did Tom get his brains from? From Almighty God! Might is right, I say, as old Carlyle said.”

“Lucidity was hardly that gentleman’s merit,” Mr. Monk observed. “‘Right’ is what is good for society; might is child-murder for lust or greed: and, if Mr. Ponting is right to make children pale by the

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might in his brain, those must be right who have made *him* pale by their might, both sides getting their mights from Almighty God. But, then, of course, that is a fancy that wealth is the effect of brains. Look at me—so rich, and no brains, as Lord Baseling has just suggested; look at brigands, burglars, George the Third—rich and no brains; or look at yourself, Saunders: *you* have brains and three million pounds; but you would never say that you have three million times more brains than a mill-hand who has one pound. I have now demonstrated that our wealth is not the effect of our *brains*, but of the infancy of Government; in general the richest have the least brains, for the type——”

But now Sir Thomas sprang to the balcony-rail, breathing: “Why, there comes the very J.C. fellow——! What on earth——?”

Lord Baseling, too, sprang to look: and while their two backs were turned, Mr. Monk quickly tore off a fragment from his dance-programme, scribbled on it some cyphers with the programme-pencil, then drew a ring from his finger, pressed a spring in it, and crammed the fragment of

programme into the ouch-cavity under the ring's cat's-eye; then pressed the ring on to his cigar-end; and cast the cigar away before his companions' eyes, who remarked the casting-away, but not the ring.

The cigar fell with excellent aim upon a lawn-path...

Meantime, the eyes of the other two were fixed upon the man who had that day given to Sir Thomas the name "Pember." He was pelting up the steps of a terrace in a stress of haste, his hat cast back

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from his forehead, his clogs' clattering clinking even to the ears on the balcony. The moon, secluded somewhere among cloud, was at its full, so his movements were clearly seen, though shaded by the edge of an orangery: he ran some yards, then walked with precipitate steps, mopping his forehead; but, on coming opposite the balcony, stopped to pick up something; then was on afresh, to disappear, running, into shrubbery near the house-back. He had not given one half-a-glance up at the balcony.

"How's he got here?" Sir Thomas muttered, agaze after the vanished figure.

"Picked up something," remarked Lord Baseling: "apparently Mr. Monk's cigar-end..."

"Must be pretty poor to do that," Sir Thomas Saunders remarked.

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Pember ran until winded, then walked to a wrought-iron gate, over which, as it was locked, he tossed his clogs, and climbed; and now he pressed the spring of the ring picked up, switched-on a pocket-lamp, and contrived to decipher Mr. Monk's cypher: "Council C. 1035 N.O. Saunders hard-headed. Better act now. See me." Even as he rushed the ring into his pocket, he was running afresh.

He ran down some broken ground to a beck, then over a board-bridge, up a "tump;" but midway up stopped, muttering in trouble, "Oh, this can't be the way!" and back he sped down, then up the beck's bank by a footpath, stumbling among rocks and shrubs under sombre boscage. This footpath led him into a covert's grass-ride; and now he sighed with satisfaction, hearing near a noise of waters in

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a place named "The Ponds," where a number of ponds tumble upon one another with a mumbling. And now, after again doffing his clogs, he went

stealing from tree to tree; but it was gloomy in there under yews and great evergreens that moped over the pools, and it was some time before his eyes descried a man who leant against a boat's gunwale, gazing at the wavelets. Pember muttered to himself: "In time."

He stole forward, and, when two yards from the man, suddenly said "Shame, James Davis!," upon which the man span round with a frantic agitation painted on his face—a mechanic of thirty, haggard now with hunger, but good-looking: a frank forehead, eyes bright with intelligence.

He had round his throat a rope tied to a rock—having been about to take a Japanese revenge upon Sir Thomas Saunders, who had dismissed him, by drowning himself in Sir Thomas's pond...

When Pember held a bottle to his teeth he got down a gulp, and gasped, "God, man, how you startle a man!"—trembling like a motor-bus from head to toe; then: "How come you to be here? startling a man to death like this..."

"Let's get our breath"—from Pember, sweat dropping down his beard; "I have run from Sodham——"

"After *me*?"—Davis started anew.

"Yes, after you, Davis."

"How could you know, man——?"

"I gathered; your wife guesses, too... What, by the way, was to have become of *her*, if you had done this?"

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"God guard the woman!"—Davis glanced wildly skyward: "but, as for me, I give up—I'm done—for there's no hell below so desperate bad as this one."

"Desperate, Davis? not radiant with hope?"—from Pember, with an undertook.

"Yes, yes, it's no good gasing," Davis testily said: "I've made up my mind now, and the thing's going to be done."

"It isn't," Pember mentioned.

"Look here, you mean well, but it's no good"—from Davis, tearing his arm free—"you get away, and leave me to it."

"No, I'll stay."

Now Davis flushed into irritation, crying: "But who the devil are you, Pember——?"

"I'm willing to make a bargain," Pember now said, gazing down at that sluggishness of the lake's gushing on its shingle: "You come home now, and I undertake to meet you at the market-corner— Know anything about chloral hydrate? Wonderful stuff! Eighty grains kill without the least discomfort to one, they say. Now, I happen to have some: and I hand you a dose the day after to-morrow at lunch-time, if you then still wish to leave God's world to fight out its fight without your help——"

"What guarantee have I——?" Davis began to ask, secretly hankering after two more nights of life.

"Well, you haven't known me long"—Pember's lids veiled his eyes—"but still——"

"Oh, no doubt you're a man of your word—unless there's some trick——"

"No trick!—I promise. Let me help you with

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the rope"—with a forceful gentleness he unloosed it, swung rope and stone into the pool, and now, brushing his palms together, said: "There, that's done; now we are back in life, and I am badly hungry—join me at supper?" producing sandwiches and shop-cakes from his cloak.

Davis's eyes devoured that fare before his mouth did; and, sitting in the boat, they ate, drank, Davis saying: "Pember, you're a wonderful being... Who are you, Pember? What the deuce are you? I've often wondered. Whoever you are, that poor woman who is my wife will never forget your name——"

"Talking of your wife," Pember said, with a look, "we shouldn't stay here banqueting, for the woman's dying of fright... Let's be footing it: and not one word to her, mind, about your having been here"—they started out—round the park, down the long hill to Sodham, past heaps of brick and breeze, rubbish, slag, blackened land, in by the Sounders' Arms, the Cross, through an intricacy of streets, until they passed up under The Archway into The Old Town, as St. Anne's church-clock struck Two. And there in an alley they spied a light shining from a room in which a wife lay on the floor, waiting in woe. Here Pember stopped, and while whispering "She mustn't see me with you," slipped ten shillings into Davis with the quickness of a pick-pocket; then walked off to his lodging, not to sleep, but to pen many letters that morning...

On the second noon after that, when “the hands” at Routledge’s foundry trooped out into the yard, Pember among them, he at once made his way tow’ard the market-corner, where the post-office

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stands, trudging along smudged in face, munching thick junks of bread-and-butter, tilting his bottle of tea at his lips with a hand black and blistered from “tub” and truck—a big figure that filled the eye with surprise, infinitely odd to Sodham, yet somehow not foreign to it... “I’d bang thee, J.C., for sixpence, classy as thee think’st thaself,” remarked, in passing, the pigmy Tim Carter of the gas-works, rough as six rasps; and Lizzie Lee of Saunders’s, toddling along under her head-shawl, said affectionately at him “there’s hair,” and smacked him on the arm. Indeed, Pember had for the femaledom of Sodham an attraction which the men saw, and secretly resented: so that he was sometimes in danger of roughish handling.

There at the market-corner paced Davis awaiting him, pale, a smile of determination on his lips, but a new light now in his eyes; and at once Pember, who approached him holding out a vial, said: “Here’s the poison I promised you.”

“Take that away,” muttered Davis sullenly, averted.

“Well!” went Pember, dropping his jaw in mock astonishment: “changed your mind?”

“You can read that,” Davis mentioned, holding out a letter received that morning—from L.P. Headquarters, asking if Davis would stand against Saunders in the coming bye-election...

“Well!” went Pember with an exaggerated jaw of astonishment: “what a thing! To stand against——! Suppose you had been dead? Dead men can’t stand, nor sit. And against Saunders in Sodham——! The man will have convulsions!”

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“It’s utterly useless, of course; but I’ll make a fight of it, if I die.”

“If you *don’t* die, you mean, man!”—with the dropped jaw of mockery. “Well, but that’s brave! that’s brave of you! Aye, and you’ll win, I prophesy... But who’ll be your agent? Will you have *me* for your helper in this fight? Will you? I’ll have time, for I have this morning been dismissed from Routledge’s.”

“Whatever for?”

"Reducing hands—that's the excuse. But, come, I'll tell you the truth of it, to make you fiery in your fight: two days ago I bid Sir Thomas Saunders to take you back at Bread Street——"

"You—bid——?" Davis breathed it.

"But is it surprising to you, Davis, that a mechanic should command these people? Aren't they commoner fellows than you, then? Yes: for the attempts made to educate them have been all made on wrong lines, turning them out, not athletes, but cripples so distorted and impotent to think straight a little, that such as Saunders actually come to think their own interests of more importance than anything in heaven or earth—commoner fellows than you, whose laboratory training in the workshop has been genuinely educative, making you their rightful masters. Why, then, the surprise?—tell me."

"You are right—go on with your story."

"I spoke, then, to Saunders about you; Saunders has nodded to Routledge's; Routledge has hounded me out. And you see how that policeman over there is eyeing at me—an effort is being made to drive me from Sodham. Tell the men of this; ask them whose

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country this is, Davis, and *make* them answer; appeal to their human reason; point to the two mills, the raised death-rate due to their closing—greater than if a Prussian brigade had shelled Sodham. And it is no plague from God, look, this drop in cotton-cargoes: you will be duly posted soon in the details of negotiations now going on between Saunders and Chicago as to a corner in cotton; and you will bawl this thing to all Sodham——"

"My goodness, how is it possible you can know?"—Davis was all a stare.

"You will bawl it abroad!" a light rising in Pember's eyes—"you will force Saunders to withdraw from the contest——"

"'Force'—Ah, now you're talking wild."

"You will force Saunders to withdraw! You have to *win* this war. You will scatter bribes broadcast——"

"Ha, ha, you going to supply the chink...?"

"*Saunders* will supply the chink! *Saunders* will implore the men to vote for you! *Saunders* will bribe them with hundreds of thousands on your behalf——!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Pember, you're a——"

"There goes factory-bell; I work on till knocking-off to-night: then we meet."

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Fight never went more fast and furious...

The more so, since for long years Sodham had seen no fight. The sitting member had been Lord Douglas Lauderdale, a whipper-snapper nominee of a Saunders too preoccupied to "sit" himself; but, as Lord Douglas had now "to sit and lie in another

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place," as Saunders joked, Saunders for his own purposes had determined to "sit and lie" in person. Astonishment was his when he learned that it was to be no "walk-over"! he to have the bother of a contest—with his own ex-workman. And no sooner had the Liberal Caucus beheld the cockiness of the Labourites, than they, too, were moved to put up a man, one Sir Borlase Smyth-Vyvyan—a three-cornered business.

Saunders, however, although disgusted at this invasion of an Englishman's castle, felt safe: for the womenfolk of those of the men who were not under his thumb were under his thumb. "They would," he said, "but they daren't..."

As to Davis, what was wrong with him was shortage of cash: he like a brook, Saunders and Smyth-Vyvyan roaring Missouris. Their names blazed from all walls and windows; they waged the campaign from eleven and from twelve committee-rooms, ranging the constituency in motor-cars from open-air meeting to meeting, like breezy heralds with flags, scattering glad tidings: Davis's poor headquarters was in an Old Town slum. The awe of Saunders in Sodham prevented his ex-mechanic from getting a roof to speak under, until Smyth-Vyvyan, coming to the rescue, lent him a school-room. The two Old-Party heads sent down to the Associations messages of cheer, which the two Sodham sheets shrieked to the four winds: Davis had no message so shouted; no medallions with photos of himself: the question on his side was the payment of his posters-bill. "What about those bribes that you said I was to scatter?" he asked Pember, laughing: "they'd

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come in handy, if they'd turn up!" Pember veiled his eyes with his lids to breathe: "Bribery is illegal."

This man, Pember, meantime, was like a cavalry-soldier fighting for life in the thick of a scrimmage—and with little less danger: for the mood of Sodham during those days was most ugly and grum. Roughest of the rough Black Country, Sodham was now being lashed with storms of excitement, like wine on a famished stomach: for though Saunders had reopened one of the mills to popularise himself, everywhere else hands were being sent away, and on Saturday nights a thousand homes had to face Sunday without a loaf. Women and children with pinched faces collected at the offices of the relief-agencies, at the Collecting-stall in the Market, at the bread-and-soup dépôt of the Brotherhood in Bridge Lane, who were distributing 2500 meals a day, and at a Kitchen established by the I.L.P. in Bread Street: but the men mostly kept aloof, moody and mute, fickle, dangerous, hard to please, bristling with the *touch-me-not* of the hedge-hog. Groups of young hooligans, like loosened gales, ranged at midnight, to smash tradesmen's glass. At the mass-meetings mobs flung missiles, struggled like a scrimmage of street-dogs, and then grumbled of the three candidates “to the devil with the lot of you.” And over it all brooded that smoke of Sodham, made garish by the glares of factory and gas-lamps, like the place where “hope never comes that comes to all.”

In all this Pember had opened his mouth to shout, and nothing under the sun could be found to shut it. The battle had waxed too hot now for the hooded

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coat, and he fought in a Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers, rambling about with a box to stand on, every day spouting before the gates of Routledge's, among the rowdiest of the rowdy. “That workmen should send freebooters to represent them—that was clever! like asses sending jackals!”

“*Roobish! it's thee that's the ass.*”

“Two-thirds of the electors one kind of creature! Two-thirds of the representatives another kind of creature! *That* was clever! *That* was representative Government for the very geese to scream at!”

“*Lad's right there!*” mixed with “*Shoot oop, or us'll shoot thee oop!*”...

But ever these last voices were the stronger, for a sinister whisper had been set going against Pember—the word “police,” the word “wanted”—a whisper that he was masquerading as a labouring-man so as to bury himself away, but had been run to earth, was under observation of the eyes that know, even though he was allowed for an hour to spout and throw dust in

people's eyes, inciting them to what would cause them to lose their jobs, and ruin Sodham...

"I think I should lie low for a day or two, Pember, if I were you," Davis said two days before nomination-day: "I am in touch with certain parties who have given me the tip that threats are being made in certain quarters."

Pember was sitting on the counter-of-boxes in the committee-room; and, looking out into the alley, tears sprang to his eyes. He made no reply.

"Personally," Davis went on, "I don't see a bit

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of good in going on with this fight. Where's the good, after all? I may get 800 votes..."

Pember's eyes rested on his with upbraiding in them. He said: "There are more men, and women, in this town fundamentally for you than for the other two, though a habit of funk and slavery toward the name "Saunders"—it's *the name* they're afraid of! for, of course, the man can't take vengeance on them without ruining himself. And, if you had proclaimed Saunders's connection with the corner in cotton, as I begged you, their indignation might have overcome their funk."

"It wouldn't," Davis answered: "I've hinted it, and they haven't understood, or haven't cared. Curious crew! Who can understand 'em? And why haven't *you* proclaimed it? The law of libel——"

"Not that. *I* have—reasons."

"Mysterious man that you are"—Davis began to say, but was stopped by a breathless man who ran in to announce that a crowd in Market Square were pelting the painters whom Pember had set to paint up a sentence there: for Pember had contrived to hire the wall-space between some second and third floor windows—telling Davis that well-wishers had sent a subscription for this. And now the Job's-messenger announced that a mob of clogs had got hot-headed against the painters: this being at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon, six days before polling-day.

At this announcement Pember bounded upright, and, even as Davis laid a restraining hand on him with "Let it slide, lad," he was out and running down the Old Town—toward the row.

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When he came to Market Square the painters had fled: there stood the vacant ladders, the crowd around, relishing their sense of power; and,

stretching across the wall, the letters:

“THE BALLOT IS SECRET! NO ONE’S VOTE CAN BE KNOWN!”

Up to “Is” was filled in; so was “Be Known the rest still in outline.

On seeing the situation, Pember bored his way through the outskirts of the crowd, who booed him, and ran down two streets to the sign-writer whom he had hired, to find the men there pale, in a state of agitation; but none the less he insisted upon their bargain to paint...

“What are you talking about?” the sign-master asked: “are the men to lose their lives?”

“But why not?”—from Pember: “men constantly lose their lives in battle in defence of their liberties. Why not you men now?”

“Well, you must be jesting,” the master answered. “It might be done to-night, when everybody’s abed——”

“No, *now* it must be done,” Pember answered: “it will be horribly wrong, if it is not done now, even though volunteer after volunteer, drops a corpse at that spot. Come! Who will volunteer? *Don’t* let me have to offer you money.”

“Why not try it on yourself?” demanded a man who had a cut forehead.

“I want to see *you* do it,” Pember said.

All this took up time, and it was half-past five before he contrived to inspire the youngest of the men to try.

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Most of the crowd had now left the square; the young man mounted a ladder; the work began.

He painted the S of “SECRET,” the E; but he had quickly been “spotted:” and, by miracle, like tides, the clogs gathered.

For some time no action was taken—only, the square uttered moan like the ocean; while away up there, pale, the painter painted.

The note-of-exclamation after “SECRET” was done; the Cross-clock struck six; the lamp-lighter now going his round with his gas-torch; the night grey, muggy, grum with mist.

Suddenly someone uttered command; and now the multitude like one man uttered: “*Coom Down!*”—with a power of sound that struck panic to that heart on the ladder. “Stick to it, Benson!” bellowed Pember up; but his howls were a hundred times drowned in the row now going on, and that bidding of the mob was as irresistibly strong as if the rod of God had

shattered the lad's arm, his shivering fingers failing any longer to paint. In the midst of the N of "NO" he gave in, and was down quicker than he went up. As he dropped to earth, he heard at his ear hurried words of entreaty: "You'll go up again, if I get killed, won't you?" and in the same instant Pember was stepping nimbly up the ladder, paint-pot in hand.

Here, then, was a bit of fight and true blue; but we others down below are true blue, too, and blue be it, and red, if necessary! Baffled, challenged, they instantly got their pecker up, the bull-dog jaw grinned, as they gave themselves to getting that man off that ladder: and whence the rain of missiles

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sprang, the minute Pember began to paint, was a mystery to many of themselves.

He was on the N of "ONE" when a young gentleman ran the gauntlet of stones, potatoes, glass, slag, up the ladder—a stranger in Sodham (and, indeed, there seemed to be no lack of strangers in Sodham in these last days). This young man, when half-way up, called in a hushed shout: "Oh, Arthur, why get killed? and he called "*Arthur!*," and again "*Arthur!*"; then, as Pember took no notice, fled down, flinching from the pelting like one fleeing without shelter in a shower.

A little later a bit of brick struck away Pember's left leg from its rung, and expectation stood in terror, as pitifully he slipped with slapping palms three feet down...

Still clinging, though, to his paint-pot... And he went on painting...

Only once he spoke—at "E"—when he suddenly tossed to the mob a bloody countenance to shout down with passion: "It would be quicker to upset the ladder!" A lump of coke shut him up...

He went on painting...

Some women shrieked, intrigued, entreating pity; but their shrills were insignificant like needles in a bundle of hubbub; the general sentiment was: "Shew'n J.C."...

In the midst of it, though, a new interest arose when a victoria drove up to the square—containing Sir Thomas Saunders driving late home from office-business that had accumulated upon him. It had been known that he would address a mass-meeting here about this hour, and the offence of the mob

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at the painting had been the intenser on this account.

There rose round him a roar of “*Speech!*,” the crowd with instant fickleness twisting its interest to him...

He stood and spoke: and immediately cheerning arose at the speech—local to begin, a set of eight or ten originating it, but the rest soon took it up, and, fresh from stoning his opponent, they roared. Never had Saunders thought himself so popular! He went quite eloquent! “Unity,” he said: “let’s all pull together,” while some went, unharnessed his horse, took possession of the carriage-shafts—eight men—the same set who had commenced the cheering. And still Sir Thomas went on: “Empire,” he said; “sun never sets on it; think imperially.” He mocked that Little-Englandism of Smyth-Vyvyan, never mentioning Davis—too small a thing to mock; and, as on he harangued, a man pressed to his carriage-step to say something up to him; he bent down to answer; and this man then made his way to the waiting coachman, to tell him to go on home with the mare. Sir Thomas had not really said so! But the coachman, having seen Sir Thomas speak to the man, led away the horse in its hames and harness.

When Sir Thomas stopped talking the eight men pulled; the mob made a lane; some few followed the carriage out of Sodham. But these, presently spying a redness of fire in the night behind, ran back to the excitement of it—to find, however, only a quarry-shed burning: set burning purposely to draw them back...

Meantime, the eight pulled on, bent in uphill

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labour... Sir Thomas lit a cigar, but did not notice in lighting it that his eight now had on masks... No moon, no stars, no sky; the night still, thick...

“It must be rather tiring!” Sir Thomas called: “why were you such foolish fellows?—keeping me from my dinner.”

And again presently: “Where on earth——?”

They had bolted into a by-road to the right; and now four of them were over him. As he howled, they bound up his mouth, hands, ankles...

Into a motor-brougham waiting there lampless they put him, four taking his carriage on to the Hall, where one of them, who had on a beard, reported that Sir Thomas was at his central committee-room—would come home later in the hôtel-landau.

The brougham, meantime, drove and drove. After two hours Sir Thomas's eyes were bound; and then it was an hour before the brougham drew up.

He was then led up a good many steps to a room, where he was unloosed, and left...

By groping he could feel that the room was big; a little alcove; no window; on a table an inkpot which his hand upset; a chair which he stumbled over; a bell-rope in one corner; a bed in another; a cricket somewhere outside the ear singing like a singing within the ear. There was a hearth-place, a comb and brush on it, a broken épergne, a lady's slipper. The floor, bare and dusty, was parqueted; the walls covered with silk, save where three windows had been bricked up; the bed luxurious, with an eider-down. He dropped upon it, and slept... The next day Europe knew: "Disappearance of ——!" But on the morning after, almost before

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Scotland Yard could begin to give its wits to it, Sir Thomas's nephew, and also his agent, received letters from him, stating that he was in London, that circumstances had determined him to withdraw in the way he had from the election, and from Sodham, but he would soon turn up anew, and no fuss was necessary. The letters were on Sir Thomas's private paper, the writing his. And, "Marvellous thing!" cried Davis to Pember in Market Square that morning? "you prophesied that he'd withdraw!"

"Yes, and bribe the electors on your behalf," Pember said with lowered lids: "he dislikes Smyth-Vyvyan's Little-Englandism."

Davis stared at Pember's battered face, then up at that wall-space where "The Ballot Is Secret!" screamed complete in crimson for Sodham to con.

With Sir Thomas, meanwhile, it was not faring too well. Never having missed a meal, he was as grieved at being hungry as a fish out of its element is, and those two letters of his had been written under the goad of hunger at 8 p.m. of his first day's captivity. Two sandwiches and some water had then been given him, as promised; and he had waited on foodless in that room, dark at noon, until the afternoon after, when he had anew pulled his bell.

The door then opened; two men, masked, entered with a taper; and Sir Thomas said: "So you mean to starve me...?"

"Of course not, Sir Thomas Saunders," one answered: "you may have to eat and drink whatever pleases you."

“Then, I say—a rump steak; and—Burgundy: *frappé*.”

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“Very good, Sir They withdrew.

And during half-an-hour Sir Thomas roamed the room, all his wrath and arrogance collapsing now in a mere greed to eat... It was long to him; he began to dread that the men had made game of him; but they came with a steaming tray, and the taper’s welcome gleam again.

“You were long,” he mentioned.

“We are sorry.”

“Well, then, at it,” he said, sitting.

“It would be well to pay first,” one said; “here are two of your banks’ cheque-books, with the bill-of-fare and wine-list.”

Sir Thomas glanced at “Partridge-wing... £25,000 and signing 2,500 circulars;” “Rump Steak... £40,000 and signing 4,000 circulars;” “Half-bottle Graves... £15,000...”

“Oh, well, of course,” he remarked, “this is the game of the Kidds and Averys: gang of brigands that you are.”

The others bowed a little.

“And what’s this circular I’ve got to sign?”

It was produced...

“VOTE FOR DAVIS AND EMPIRE ! ”

“Electors of Sodham! Though impelled to withdraw from the election, my interest in it continues vivid. My suggestion now is that friends who would have cast their votes for me should transfer them to Davis, who, having the scientific education of a mechanic, is likely to represent you much more intelligently—and religiously—than Smyth-Vyvyan. But the small sum of money enclosed should not be

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assumed to have any reference to the election: let it be considered as a present sent you in view of distress due to the closing of my mills. Vote, then, in your thousands for Davis, Sodham and Empire! Down with Little-Englandism!”

Sir Thomas brushed the leaflet off the table. “No, I won’t sign that. I’ll —pay more than you ask for the steak. But—I won’t sign that.”

The masked men bowed; took away the tray...

But Sir Thomas Saunders was a man born with too strong a brain to rave, or to sulk, at things-as-they-are: so he was soon again at the bell-rope; and the tray came back—not steaming now, though, the meat now shrunken to an even meaner mouthful; and late into the night, and the next forenoon, he was signing leaflets by the light of a candle that had been left him.

It was on the fourth midnight that, after he had got into bed, having “writer’s-cramp,” someone stole into that gross gloom of the room, groped for the chair, placed it by the bed, sat.

And now for some minutes a midnight dumbness there, save for the sounds of some owl warbling soothsayings without, and of water mumbling music somewhere.

Finally Sir Thomas spoke. “Who are you there?”

“Ah, you are awake,” a voice said: “my name’s Pember.”

“Ah...! And what is it you want?”

“Only to sit a little with you in your solitude—against orders, by the way. If you don’t want me, say so.”

No answer... Once more the dark was dumb.

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Then Pember: “Well, here you are in misery, and your captors in equal misery with you——”

“Oh, I want none of your pity,” Sir Thomas muttered.

“Yes, you do; and should pity us who pity you”—they were just two voices, disembodied, strange in that raylessness—“Fancy whether it is all honey to us to torture, whose aim is to bless men.”

“Law-breakers like you? Blessing men?”

“Yes, but the main fact is not that we are law-breakers, but law-changers, law-makers. And even as law-breakers—isn’t there a spirit in laws, directed, not against unselfishness, but against selfishness?—a spirit which, if a little more developed among us, would swiftly have had you done in... Tell me this, Sir Thomas: which is the more important—an army or a nation? Nation, you’ll say. Yet in the army you’d sharply be shot for what you do to the nation. Everything done in the army is done for the army’s good: each breathes for *it*, dashes himself to death for *it*; the general is a general servant; the captains are captains of industry in sacrifice—no corners in cotton there, look—you’d be shot like a dog——”

"I doubt if you know what you are talking about" Sir Thomas put in: "the corner means higher managerial efficiency, tightening of organisation: in the end it may actually *benefit* the nation—may lower prices."

"May"—from Pember—"but won't. That, though, is not the point. Even if in the end you chanced to benefit the army, you'd still be shot for entering upon enterprises immensely affecting the army with an eye solely to your own good, and be

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damned to the army's... Ah, yes, that's sin. And you won't benefit the army—not likely! A stone aimed at one lamp-post *may* happen to hit another: but there are millions of chances against one that enterprises entered upon with one object will effect some other given object—will benefit the army in the end, or in the beginning, or in the middle: well would you be shot. And, if you are shot once in the army, you should be shot a thousand times after you are dead in the nation: for bullets are cheap, and should be lavished upon you, till you taste the second death. For, ah, Sir Thomas, lying there, you see in the dark, I think, that, in amassing into your hands the millions you possess, you have milked the lids of men of a million tears. Not that the tears matter much in themselves: but they matter much for this, that each of those weepers is unique, has a genius of his own, a peculiar luck in discovering, in inventing, in effecting progress, but can't a bit while he's busy weeping: so what such as you do is to bother God's clock, to commit the cosmic enormity of blocking the climb of Life for one belly's sake: ah, yes, my God, that's sin, that's sin... But, oh, I am not here to upbraid you, but to be friends with you, if you will have me. If we quarrel, I go."

Silence again...

Then Sir Thomas: "So, this is S.S.R.S.R.?... What does 'S.S.R.S.R.' mean?"

"Means 'Secret Society for the Redress of Social Ravages'. I tell you, for I know that you will never tell anyone."

"What makes you think that? Naturally I'll tell."

"No, you won't tell. A pledge will be taken

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from you, and you will be properly warned... Our powers are not, in themselves, so great as those at present on your side, yet are greater in one

way—work underground, and are pretty great in themselves, too: for a holy spirit, meaning a public spirit, is now at work in the world; those who are with us are intelligences genuinely educated, more or less, and are not few—scientists, ladies of title, Swedes, millionaires. And we do what we do with some finesse, under the direction of the cunningest nut, may-be, now under the sun: we know everything; forget nothing; cannot be detected; cannot be escaped; our will is the higher Law of this land. It is not wise to annoy us.”

Sir Thomas, lying at its length with shut eyes, considered it, his long body hollow at present in the spot where a small paunch had been. He muttered: “And what is it you do?”

“For one thing, we give back some of the national wealth to its owners... Is it well done?”

“Everyone has a right to his opinion, I suppose.”

“But is it well done? Is it well done? I say we give back ‘some’: we should give back *all*, but we choose to leave it to you to give back the rest in your own way. We bring you here, give you a touch of hunger, suggest truths to you, reveal to you the secret of happiness... Or do you say that you have been happy hitherto?”

No answer... “No, that would be a wild fancy, if you had it”—from Pember—“been too common: happiness is for finer, lighter lives, who don’t grab grossly at her like country-cousins, but get her indirectly by trickiness.

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To be conscious of actualities—that’s happiness. But that shadow which you call ‘I’, and fight so for, and are so sure that it exists, there’s no actuality in it, man—shadow of a shadow. Look half-a-foot down into yourself—or you needn’t bother to look, it is obvious that you aren’t now the same mind or body as an embryo, as a boy named ‘Thomas Saunders’: ‘you’ have changed, are different; and a different thing can’t be the same thing. But billions of changes take place every second in a living being—in a pin; and though it is *convenient* to speak of it as the same pin, it is another—a microscope powerful enough would *reveal* that. People speak of ‘the persistence of personality after death but, then, that’s atheism: for where God is, Energy is, i.e., motion is, i.e., change is; and since Energy is everywhere, how can anything persist, save God, Energy, Motion, Change? To imagine that personality persists after death, or before death, is to imagine that there is some place or state where change is not, where

Energy, ‘God’, is not: that’s atheism. So, if one could still think something after one was dead, one could only think then: ‘That old illusion as to the persistence of personality is still with me, I see: and death has not quickened my wits’. We are series of ‘I’s’ like telegraph-poles racing past a train—‘I, I, I’s’ connected by a wire of memory: to ‘lose memory’ being to lose the illusion of personality, as the newspapers tell. And so brief a series! You’ll soon be dead, Saunders: isn’t that a fact that a businessman might be expected to have brains enough to realise? And in the hour of death, if you are smitten

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then to some quickness of wit, what will you be thinking of things? I know very well what: you’ll say: “That pap of chaff that they imagine to be education, how it managed to soppify the good brain my mother gave me, and rob it of all brawn for thought! so that I have spent my strength to pamper a phantom; and, believing each hearsay to be true, each show to be real, I have as much forgotten God as though not He, but ‘I’, was real; nay, the drop has gone against the river, and it is not odd that I was so reft and fretted, never once smelling the smell of that Rose among the roses, nor my mouth has ever drunk from the cup of carousing: for what a bumpkin they made of me!” You see, happiness is for hardheaded, practical people, educated to detect facts—not just facts under your nose like a cut thumb or the money in a corner in cotton, but facts a bit less obvious. Men like you take the wrong turning, man, for happiness, bothering about corners in cotton, when there’s a cosy corner, with bumpers and tunes, and supper with the Muses, not far up the other path. And only through a laziness of the brain due to that opium-habit of Oxford and Cornhill, a lazy assumption that whatever is condoned by monkey-law and custom must be well done. If men of your kind were dissected, not one microbe of crime-mood would be detected in you: yet you are pests, keeping Life low and dull, yourselves dullest. But if——”

He stopped—felt the bed throb, as when a strong man fights to stifle a sob.

Silence...

Then Pember: “*You say something.*”

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“Let me alone, man,” came from the bed; but then, very low: “Aye, there’s truth in it

“Yes, of course”—from Pember: “and I am glad that you *say* it: it is a king coming into his kingdom that said that.”

After which Sir Thomas unbent a little; spoke a little; Pember spoke on; and it was hours before he stole out, when Sir Thomas was sleepy, and morning near...

That day the men who attended upon Sir Thomas’s wants attended without masks, serving him as a sovereign is served; his tortures stopped; he took exercise in a yard; but was still kept a prisoner three days.

• • • • • •

By the first post on polling-day—Friday, the 18th November—15,047 of the workers of Sodham received Sir Thomas Saunders’s signed circular in registered envelopes, with two £10 notes.

Men put down the notes, moved away, eyeing them, came back to them, rather breathless, suspicious; then, perhaps, moving to windows, saw their mates Hurriedly flaunting notes and circulars; and soon men like ants were running to and fro, asking: “Hast had one?”

“Had one, aye! Hast thoo?”

“It’s from Saunders’s!”

“Vote for Davis and Empire, is it? Us’ll shew them voting this day!”

When the tidings got to Davis, he cried out, all aghast, before several men: “Well, Pember prophesied it all!”

And soon that rumour flew through Sodham’s

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breadth, that it was somehow *Pember* who was at the bottom of it all! that Pember, whom Sodham had so pelted, had not turned ratty, but, if they had killed him, would still have wished to help them; and, so far from being “wanted” by the police, was really a friend of Saunders’s!—though pretending to be a workman, just to see what the life of workmen was like; and it was *he* who had persuaded Saunders to do this thing! But where was Pember now? Not to be found! His landlady said that he was gone, but would be back. And, meantime, the thing to do was to vote, vote, and to make vain that day the motor-cars of Smyth-Vyvyan, rushing through the streets like the weaver’s shuttle.

Many prophesied that Sodham, with all this coin in its pocket, and hysterical ecstasy in its breast, would be having the hell of a hot time that night; but, in fact, “the publics” were less populous than in the old days of care. Lots of rowdiness, though, crowdedness, and horseplay all that Friday; work was cast to the winds; and, as night darkened, excitement waxed white and wild. During “the count” a pin could have been heard to drop in the throng that crammed Market Square, until the figures were posted up—Smyth-Vyvyan, 4,211—Davis 14,797—and then, like dynamite, one cry of triumph rived the night-sky. The scientist was in... the Age of Business beginning...

On seeing the figures, Mrs. Davis fainted, and was nearly trampled while the crowd were darting at the Town Hall to snatch James Davis, and have him swept shoulder-high through the smokes of Sodham.

And in the thick of it a new rumour flew from

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tongue to tongue—that Pember was about! for his Old Town landlady had run from one to another, telling how he had come during the count, had taken his bag, his clogs, had paid her, was gone! But where to? None knew. Was he only changing lodging? or gone for good from Sodham? A sense of regret as at a gracious thing gone for ever all at once gashed the lads and lasses of Sodham; many bolted hither and thither, scouting all about his former haunts: he could not be found: until Davis himself suggested that he might have dashed by empty alleys to the railway to take the 11.7 up-train: and toward the railway a Rhone of clogs, growing as on it rolled, was soon roaring.

But too late. Only a face, pretty thick with strips of sticking-plaster, was seen by the front-rankers on breaking into the station, when Pember, hearing the todo, looked out of window, as the train moved. A little outcry, an “Oh!” of failure, went after him. He waved his hat, laughing, and was swept away.

Some moments later he was strolling in the Pullman, when one of two men who were about to sup addressed him. “Isn’t your name Pember?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I have been hearing of you during the election—You seem to have come wounded out of it! Won’t you join us at supper, and tell us about it? My name is Monk; this is Lord Baselinc. Lord Baselinc, Mr. Pember.”

Lord Baseling looked a little scared! while Mr. Monk and Pember exchanged a smile with their eyes.

“You are kind: I will,” said Pember.

Whereupon Mr. Monk yielded him the seat of

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honour at the window; and they made an agreeable party, drinking Château Yquem from a hamper: for Lord Baseling, though beer was made by himself, liked champagne better. And presently Pember, who with wistful lids could still see from his place that inflamed fog of Sodham, to which he had given a little slice of his life, fingered his glass, saying: “I will drink to the mechanics of Sodham, gentlemen, if you will join me: they are officers in the army of Man, those men, yet have no honours.”

“I will do so,” Mr. Monk said with a bow.

Lord Baseling again looked startled! but, finding himself dragged in, had to be agreeable...

“Well, then”—from Pember—“let it be Herr Teufelsdroeck’s toast: ‘The Cause of the Poor in God’s and the Devil’s name’.”

And they drank.

* * * *

When this tale had been told, a dumbness of some seconds ensued, during which none could avoid noticing that Joy sat blanched, her head bent, plucking a little at her fingers, as some carle, sinking in the dark and article of death, plucks a bit at the bed-clothes: until now the silence was blasted away by the palms of Tom Bates deciding to ply, others caught it warmly up, some ran to grasp Fragson’s hand, among them Hardacre, who was too ’cute a nut for his “political opinions” to be what the public supposed, and out now buzzed the tongues. Several, however, had found the tale distasteful—

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were in a state of doubt as to whether *they* would be the next whom the S.S.R.S.R. would be tripping up and stripping; Lady Sartory sat paled and offended; and Sir John Hay, the Cumbrian M.P., a dark and brawny man of

forty, who spoke with a little brogue, and was very friendly with Fragson, remarked to Lord Archibald Stainsbury, sitting next him, "Funny taste."

Lord Archibald smiled and shrugged.

"I don't mean," added Sir John, "that I blame a Socialist for telling a tale turned to gain the favour of a Socialist girl. After all, one has got to be a bit of a Socialist nowadays: for the test of every bright mind is necessarily this—that he will despise the past, will feel himself superior to long-dead men with their half-baked laws and thoughts; and the matter-of-fact that every bright mind in the Europe of to-day is something not unlike a Socialist, ought, by itself, to be enough to decide the common man that way: for he must be pretty thick-headed to think himself righter than the bright. But where I question our tale-teller's taste is in his sardonic references to Lord Baseling's beer, when Miss Joy Richards' fortune is the offspring of beer, and when it is common knowledge that he personally is not averse from sharing that beer-stained purse."

"Yes, that occurs to me," Lord Archibald observed.

"I conjecture, though," Sir John added, "that Fragson deeply feels that beer is one of the banes of England, beer and whisky—without reference to the alcohol in them, for it is still a question whether a little alcohol is bad for men; but what the English

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character lacks is love, flush, piety, that touch of fire, of amorousness and romance, religious, sexual, which the fruit-countries produce. A Frenchman loves God's French mother and a wench, an Englishman loves God's English son and a jug. How great will be that statesman who gives fruit to England, and bruises the dragon of Bass! for it is because beer and whisky are not made of fruit, like wine and brandy, that we have the difference of mood between Bumble and Petrarch. As regards fruit, England is truly a God-forsaken land: one national fruit, the plum—meaning a fruit both luscious and cheap: and during one week of plums she becomes a fruit-sucking country, eating for the rest of the year a foreign fruit called 'banana', or rather seeing it, for it is dear, a penny apiece, not a penny a dozen, and, anyway, is old food, having hardly much resemblance to actual bananas. It was never an English apple that tempted Eve, though some of the pears are luscious—but beyond the people's pocket! they see, they taste, they never feast... I sometimes wonder why they consent to live in the feudal England of to-day—know no other country! I know why *I* live in

her, and fly back to her—because of her climate, of a bleakness in some of her breezes that carry me back to primæval beaches which mourned and mourned before the moon was old, moving in me emotions more to me than is all the gold of Morgan. But a people without a profusion of fruit must needs be dull and Bumbly, since fruit is The Mother's blush and bloom. In the West, indeed, it is better, in Devonshire, Wales, where cider and perry are drunk, and you get some love

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and religious 'revivals'—beer having as depressing an effect upon lovers as cider has an inspiring, so that in Eastern England the whole attitude toward love is stodgy. Think of that glare of gas-lights in the London parks at night, and arc-lamps frying in a spattering of azure fire! The idea of a city-park is to enable city-men to cozen themselves into the illusion that they are in the country—and how fatal to such a fancy is one glare of gas! Shelley said that hell is a city much like London, but London is like heaven and like one hemisphere of Venus: 'there shall be no night there'—the vile place! no stars, no *ποτνία νὺξ—σεμνὴ—ὑπνοδοτέιρα*: but the motive of the park-lights is to restrain folks from making love, since that is awfully 'shockeen', don't you know—fancy gas-lights in the Bois de Boulogne, to violate the dusk of those nooks where lovers dote and do: into what a cackle of mockery would it set all France! Probably Fragson had something of this in mind: but any reference to beer may be bad policy!—in this particular company."

"Yes," Lord Archibald said; "but, then, Fragson is a being dead to either respect or prospect when uttering what he deems to be true or witty: I think he would offend fifty emperors, and lose fifty fortunes, rather than leave unuttered half a word of what he had to utter. It is difficult not to revere the sincere soul of this citizen and servant of the Most High, and although I differ in——"

But before he could specify in what respects he differed from Fragson, Fragson himself approached, and sat, next to Sir John Hay, so that other things had now to be spoken about.

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CHAPTER X

THE next was Tom Bates' day, who by lot h was the last, but for Sir John Hay; and the day came with even more flutter for the ladies, more sly eyeings at the sightless face, wise-acre wagerings, than on the Fragson day—though the men had little suspicion of all this, nor any more apprehension as to the competition of the guileless sailor-lad than eleven Goliaths of one David.

It drizzled that forenoon, a wind blew strong and chill with a delicious novelty, since everybody had forgotten in the reign of the summer glare that rain sometimes falls: so an excursion to Les Cascades, the Comté de Pichegrue-Picard's place thirteen kilomètres away, was abandoned, the day being spent in the Castle—some forming card-parties, some attending, in the so-called “Small Gallery,” a fête of organ-music, of fiddling, of singing, in which last that alto voice of Joy at one time joined, she starting to sing “Abide With Me,” but in the midst of it her lips quivered, she faltered, stopped, tossed her hand helplessly, laughed, asked to be let off.

Through the day Bates, for his part, remained in his apartments, till near three o'clock, when he was observed by some girls to be perambulating in a garden-nook with his long legs, short jacket, peaked cap, his gaze turned up to the trees, within which birds were chirping at the sun just returning; and

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hanging in his hand was some manuscript: for it had been proposed, and agreed by all, that *he* should read his tale, because of his little stuttering trouble.

He did not that day, as generally, help Joy's Aunt Anne to convoy the blind eyes from the Castle down the cliff-steps into the arbour; but soon afterwards appeared in the arbour, flung out his hand to everyone, laughing, cutting a buffoon face, then took his place as usual on the slabs by the balcony not far from his sweetheart's feet, but without discovering a syllable to say to her; nor did she say anything to him. Yet he did not seem fluttered, nor a bit less nut-brown than ever, though he could not raise his eyes without finding a dozen bright eyes resting in some expression of interest on his face; and presently when Fragson broke through the gabble of tongues with “Let's have it, Bates!” Tom obediently drew forth his

sheets, blanched an instant to the heart at that hush which rushed horridly down upon his head, then instantly blushed black, as night-darkness bites back at lightning-stab; and, seated with his back against the balcony, he began to give the tale which he named

DARK LOT OF ONE SAUL.

What I relate, ladies, is from a document found in a Cowling Library chest of records, written in a very odd hand on fifteen strips of a material resembling papyrus, yet hardly papyrus, and on two squares of parchment, which Prof. Stannistreet recognises as “trunkfish” skin; the seventeen pages being gummed together at top by a material like tar

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or pitch. A Note at the end in a different hand and ink, signed “E. G.,” says that the document was got out of a portugal (a large variety of cask) by the Spanish galleass *Capitana* between the Bermudas and the Island of St. Thomas; and our knowledge that at this point a valley in the sea-bottom goes down to a depth of four thousand fathoms affords, as will be noticed, a rather startling confirmation of the statements made in the document. The narrator, one Saul, was born sixteen to twenty years before the accession of Queen Elizabeth, and wrote about 1601, at the age of sixty, or so; and the correspondence of his statements with our modern knowledge is the more arresting, since, of course, a sailor of that period could only know anything of submarine facts by actual experience. I modify a few of his archaic expressions, guessing at some words where his ink ran.

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This pressing paucity of air hath brought me to the writing of that which befel, to the end that I may send forth the writing from the cave in the portugal for the eye of who may find it, my pen being a splinter broken from the elephant’s bones, mine ink pitch from the lake, and my paper the bulrush-pith. Beginning therefore with my birth, I say that my name in the world was James Dowdy Saul, I being the third child of Percy Dowdy Saul, and of Martha his wife, born at Upland Mead, a farm in the freehold of my father, near the borough of Bideford, in Devon: in what year born I know not, knowing only this, that I was a well-grown stripling upon the coming of Her Grace to the throne.

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I was early sent to be schooled by Dominie John Fisher in the borough, and had made good progress in the Latin Grammar (for my father would have me to be a clerk), when, at the age of fifteen, as I conjecture, I ran away, upon a fight with Martin Lutter, that was my eldest brother, to the end that I might adopt the sea as my calling. Thereupon for two years I was with the shipmaster, Edwin Occhines, in the balingar, *Dane*, trading with Channel ports; and at his demise took ship at Penzance with the notorious Master Thomas Stukely, who, like many another Devon gentleman, went apirating 'twixt Scilly and the Irish creeks. He set up a powerful intimacy with the Ulster gallant, Master Shan O'Neil, who many a time has patted me upon my back; but, after getting at loggerheads with Her Grace, he turned Papist, and set out with Don Sebastian of Portugal upon an African expedition, from which I felt constrained to withdraw myself.

Thereupon for a year, perhaps two, I was plying lawful traffic in the hoy, *Harry Mondroit*, 'twixt the Thames' mouth and Antwerp; till, on a day, I fell in at "The Bell" in Greenwich with Master Francis Drake, a youth of twenty-five years, who was then gathering together mariners to go on his brigantine, the *Judith*, his purpose being to take part in Master John Hawkins' third expedition to the settlements in Espaniola.

Master Hawkins sailed from Plymouth in the *Jesus*, with four consorts, in October of the year 1567. After being mauled by an equinox storm in Biscay Bay, we refitted at the Canaries, and, having taken four hundred blacks on the Guinea coast, sailed

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for the West Indies, where we gained no little gold by our business. We then proceeded to Cartagena and Rio de la Hacha; but it should now be very well known how the *Jesus* lost her rudder; how, the ships' bottoms being fouled, we had perforce to run for San Juan de Ulloa in the Gulf of Mexico; and how, thirteen Spanish galleons and frigates having surprised us there, the Admiral de Baçan made with us a treaty the which he treacherously broke at high noon-day, putting upon us the loss of three ships and our treasure, the *Minion* and the *Judith* alone escaping: this I need not particularly relate.

The *Judith*, being of fifty tons portage only, and the *Minion* of less than one hundred, both were now crowded, with but little water aboard, and the store-chests empty. After lying three days outside the sand-ridge, we set sail on Saturday, the 25th September, having heard tell of a certain place on the

east reaches of the Gulf where provisions might be got. This we reached on the 8th October, only to meet there little or nothing to our purpose; whereupon a council was called before Master Hawkins in the *Minion*, where one hundred of us proffered ourselves to land, to the intent that so the rest might make their way again to England on short rations.

The haps of us who landed I will not particularise, though they were various, God wot, remaining in my head as a grievous dream, but a vague one, blotted out, alas, by that great thing which Almighty God hath ordained for a poor man like me. We wandered within the forests, anon shot at by Indians, our food being roots and berries, and within three weeks reached a Spanish station, whence we were

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sent captives into Mexico. There we were Christianly behaved to, fed, clothed, and then distributed among the plantations—a thing amazing to us, who were not ignorant of the pains put upon English sailors in Spain; but in those days no Holy Office was in Mexico, and on this count were we spared, some of us being bound over to be overseers, some to be handicraftsmen in the towns, etc. As for me, after an absence from it of seven months, I once more found myself in the township of San Juan de Ulloa, where, having ever a handy knack in carpentry, I had soon set myself up for a wright.

No one asked me aught as to my faith; I came and went as I thought good; nor was it long but I had got some knowledge of the Spanish tongue, stablished myself in the place, and taken to wife Lina, a wench of good liking, daughter of Señora Gomez of the *confiteria*, or sweetmeat-store; and out of her were born unto me Morales and Salvador, two of the goodliest babes that ever I have beheld.

I abode in San Juan de Ulloa two years and eleven months: and these be the two years of quietness and happiness that I have had in this my life.

On the 13th afternoon of the month of February in the year 1571 I was wending homeward over the *prado* that separated my carpentry from the *confiteria* of my mother-in-law, when I saw four men approaching me, as to whom I straightway understood that men of San Juan they were not: one was a Black Friar, so hooded and cowled, that of his countenance nothing was discovered, save the light of his eyes; another was bearded—of the Order of Jesus; another wore the broad chapeau of a notary,

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and the fourth had the aspect of an alguazil, grasping a bâton in his hand. And, on seeing them, I seemed to give up heart and hope together: for a frigate hulk had cast anchor that morning beyond the sand-ridge, and I conjectured that these men were of her, were ministers of the Holy Office, and had heard of me while I was awork.

I have mentioned that no Inquisition was in Mexico afore 1571: but within the last months it had been bruited in San Juan that King Phillip, being timorous of English meddling in the gold-trade, and of the spread of English heresy, was pondering the setting up of the Holy Office over Espaniola. And so said, so done, in *my* case, at any rate,* who, being the sole heretic in that place, was waylaid on the *prado* in the afternoon's glooming, and heard from the alguazil that word of the familiars: "follow on to be then led down the little *callejon* that runneth down from the *prado* to the coast, where a cockboat lay in waiting.

To the moment when they pushed me into the boat, I had not so much as implored one more embrace of my poor mate and babes, so dumb was I at the sudden woe: but in the boat I tumbled prone, although too tongue-tied to utter prayer, whereupon an oarsman put paw upon me, with what I took to be a consoling movement: a gesture which set me belching forth into lamenting. But with no long dallying they put out, having me by my arms; and

* It is well known that not one of Saul's ninety-nine companions, who landed from the *Judith* and *Minion*, escaped, but all were hunted, cast into dungeons, tortured, lashed naked through streets, some burned in the *auto de fe*, and some handed over to the Office in Seville to be sentenced to the galleys.

beyond the sand-ridge I was took up the poop's ladder into the frigate, led away to the far end of the forecastle's vault, and there left with a rosca loaf, four onions, and a stoup of water in the sprit room, a very strait place cumbered by the bulk of the bow-sprit's end, and by the ends of a couple of culverins.

I know not yet whither it was the will of my captors to carry me, whether to Europe, or to some port of the Spanish Main; but this I know that the next noon when I was led apoop, no land was visible, and the sea had that hard aspect of the mid-sea.

Our ship, the which was called the *San Matteo*, was a hulk of some four hundred tons portage, high afore, and high stuck up apoop, her fore castle having two tiers, and her poop's castle three, with culverins in their ports. Her topsides were so tumbled home, that her breadth at the water may have been double her breadth at her wales, and she had not the new-fangled fore-and-abafts of Master Fletcher, such as the *Judith* wore to sail on a wind. But she was costly built, her squaresails being every one of the seven of heavy florence, broidered in the belly, and her fifty guns of good brass fabric. She was at this time driving free afore the wind under full spread, but with a rolling so restless as to be jeopardous, I judged. In fact, I took her for a crank pot, with such a tophamper and mass of upper-works, that she could scarce fail to dip her tier of falcons, if the sea should lash.

I was brought up to the master's room, the which was being used as an audience-chamber, and there at a table beheld five men in file. He in the centre, who proved to be both my accuser and judge, presently

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gave me to know that the evidence against me had been laid before the Qualifiers of the Office—which Qualifiers I understood to be none other than themselves there present—and been approved by the said Qualifiers; and when I had given replies to a catalogue of interrogatories as to my way of life in San Juan, I was then straightway put to the question. My breast, God wot, was rent with terrors, but my bearing, I trust, was distinguished by Christian courage. The interview was but brief: I demurred to kiss the cross; whereupon the President addressed me—he being the Dominic that I saw on the *prado*, a man whose mass of wrinkles, although he was yet young, and his wry smile within a nest of wrinkles, I carry still in my mind. My rudeness, he said, would prove to be but puny: for that during the day I should be put to a second audience in order to move me to a confession, and after to the screws.

For that second audience I waited, but it came not: for, huddled up in a corner 'twixt the sprit's end and a culverin's end, I became more and more aware that the *San Matteo* was labouring in the sea, and by evening mine ears were crowded with the sound of winds, so that I could no more hear the little sounds of the cook's house, the which was not in the hold, as with English vessels, but in a part of the fore castle abaft my cell. No food was brought me all that day, and I understood that all had enough to trouble them other than my unblest self.

I fell into a deep sleep, nor, I believe, awaked until near the next noon, though between noon and midnight was but little difference in my prison. I now anew knew, as before, of a tumult of winds, and

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understood by the ship's motion that she was now fleeing afore the gale, with a swinging downhill gait. Toward night, being anhungered, I got to thumping in desperate wise upon my prison, but no signal was given me that any heard me, and doubtless I was unheard in that turmoil of sounds.

And again I fell into forgetfulness, and again about midday, as I conjecture, bounded awake, being now roused by a shout of wind pouncing in upon me through the door, the which a stripling had just opened. He tumbled toward me with a bowl of turn-turn and pork, and, having shot it upon my lap, put mouth to mine ear with the shout: "Eat, Englishman! Thou art doomed for the ship!"

He then fell out, leaving me in a maze. But I think that I had not ended the meal when the meaning of his words was but little uncertain to me, who was versed in the manners of the sea, and of Spanish seamen in especial; and I said within myself "*the San Matteo* is now doubtless near her end; the sun hath gone out of the sky; the course peradventure lost: and I, the heretic, am condemned to be thrown away, as Jonah, to assuage the tempest."

The rest of that day, therefore, I lay upon my face, recommending my spirit, my wife, and my children to my Creator, until, toward night, three sailors came in, laid hands on me, and hauled me forth; and I was hardly hauled to the castle's portal, when my old samite coif leapt off my head, and was swept away.

Surely never mortal wretch had bleaker last look at the scheme of being than I that night. There remained some sort of disastrous glimmering in the

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air, but it was a glimmer that was itself but a mood of gloom. A rust on the nigh horizon that was the sun was swinging on high above the working of the billows, then hurling itself below, with an alternate circular working, as it were a dissolute or sea-sick thing. The skies were, as it were, tinted with inks, and appeared to be no higher beyond the sea than the mizzen-top, where sea and sky were mixed. I saw that the poop's mast was gone, and the *San Matteo* under two sails only, the mizzen-top sail and the sprit sail:

yet with these she was careering in desperate wise like a capon in a scare from the face of the tempest, taking in water with an alternate process over her port and starboard wales, and whirled to her top-castles in sprays: so that she was as much within the sea as on it. Our trip from my prison to the poop's castle must have occupied, with his halts, no less than twenty minutes of time, so swung were our feet between deep and high: and in that time a multitude of sounds the most drear and forlorn seemed borne from out the bowels of the darkness to mine ears, as screams of craziness, a ding-dong of sea-bells, or cadences of sirens crying, or one sole toll of a funeral-knell. I was as one adream with awe': for I understood that into all that war of waters I was about to go down, alone.

Lashed to the starboard turret of the poop's castle by a cord within the ring at its paunch was a Portugal, such as be employed to store pork on big voyages; and, sprawling on the deck, with his paws clutched within a window-sill of the turret, was the Jesuit, his robes all blown into disarray, with him being the ship's master, having a hammer's handle

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sticking out of his pouch, and four others, the particulars of whose persons mine eyes, as though I had scores of eyes that night, observed of their own act.

As I staggered near in the lax keeping of my guardians, the portugal was cast aslant in his lashing, and I could then descry within it one of those 30-inch masses of iron ballast, such as be named dradoes; by the which I understood that I should not be tossed forth coffinless, as Jonah, but in the portugal: inasmuch as the corpse of many a Jonah hath been known to "chase i' the wake," as mariners relate, to the disaster of them in the ship; and the coffining of such in ballasted casks has long been a plan of the Spanish in especial.

On my coming to the turret, he whom I took to be the master put hand upon me, uttering somewhat which the hurricane drowned in his mouth, though I guessed that he egged me to go into the portugal: and indeed I was speedily heeled up and hustled in. Resistance would have been but little difficult to me, had I willed, but could have resulted only in the rolling overboard of others with me: nor had I a spirit of resistance, nay, probably lost my consciousness upon entering, for nothing can I remember more, till the top was covered in, save only one segment of it, through which I on my face glimpsed three struggling shapes, and understood that the Jesuit, now

upheld 'twixt two of the shipmen, was shouting over me some litany or committal. In the next moment I lay choked in blackness, and had in my consciousness a hammer's banging.

Whether awake or adream, I seemed to recognise the moment when the Portugal's mass splashed the

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ocean; I was aware of the drado's bulk tumbling about the sides, and of a double bump of the iron, the one upon my breast, the other upon my right thigh.

Now, this was hardly owing to the water's roughness, for my last glance abroad before going into the Portugal had shewn me a singular condition of the sea: the ship appeared to have driven into a piece of water comparatively calm, and pallid, a basin perhaps half-a-mile in breadth, on a level rather below the rest of the ocean that darkly rolled round its edge; and the whole seemed to me to move with a slow wheeling: for I had noted it well, with that ten-eyed unwittingness wherewith I noted everything that night, as the mariners' apparel, or the four-square cap of the Jesuit crushed over his nose, or the porky stench of the portugal...

Down, swiftly down, and still profounder down, I ripped toward the foundry of things, to where the mountains and downs of the mid-sea drowse. I had soon lost all sense of motion: still, I divined—I knew—with what a swiftness I slid, profoundly drowned, mile on mile, and still down, from the home of life, and hope, and light, and time. I was standing on the drado, no less steadily than if on land, for the drado's weight held the portugal straight on end, the Portugal's top being perhaps one inch above my head—for my hands touched it, paddling for some moments as though I was actually adrown, like the paddling pattes of a hound in his drowning. But I stood with no gasping for a good span, the portugal was so roomy; and it proved as good-made as roomy, though soon enough some ominous creakings gave me to know that the sea's weight was crushing upon

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his every square inch with a pressure of tons; moreover, both my palms being pressed forth against the Portugal's side, all at once the right palm was pierced to the quick by some nail, driven inward by the squeezing of the sea's weight; and quickly thereupon I felt a drop of water fall upon my top, and presently a drop, and a drop, bringing upon me a deliberate drip,

drip: and I understood that the sea, having forced a crack, was oozing through atop.

No shock, no stir was there: yet all my heart was conscious of the hurry of my dropping from the world. I understood—I knew—when I had fared quite out of hue and shape, measure and relation, down among the dregs of creation, where no ray may roam, nor a hope grow up; and within my head were going on giddy divinations of my descent from depth to depth of deader nothingness, and dark after dark.

Groan could I not, nor sigh, nor cry to my God, but stood petrified by the greatness of my perishing, for I felt myself banished from His hand and the scope of His compassion, and ranging every moment to a more strange remoteness from the territories of His reign.

Yet, as my sense was toward whirling unto death, certain words were on a sudden with me, that for many a month, I think, had never visited my head: for it was as if I was now aware of a chorus of sound quiring in some outermost remoteness of the heaven of heavens, whence the shout of ten thousand times ten thousand mouths reached to me as a dream of mine ear: and this was their shout and the passion of their chanting: “If I ascend up into Heaven, He is there; if I make my bed in Hell, behold, He is

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there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall His hand lead me, His right hand shall hold me.”

But the lack of air, that in some minutes had become the main fact of my predicament, by this time was such, that I had come to be nothing but a skull and throat crowded with blood that would bound from me, but could not; yet I think that in the very crux of my death-struggle a curiosity as to the grave, and the nature of death—a curiosity as frivolous as the frolics of a trickster—delayed my failing; for I seemed to desire to see myself die.

Still upon my top, with a quickening drip, drip, dropped the leak, and this in my extremest smart I ceased not to mark.

But there came a moment when all my sentience was swallowed in an amazing consciousness of motion. First I was urgently jerked against the Portugal, the which was tugged sideways by some might: some moments more, and the portugal bumped upon something. By a happy instinct, I had stiffened myself, my feet on the drado, my head pressed against the top piece; and immediately I was aware of precipitous rage, haste the most rash, for a quick succession of shocks, upon rocks, as I imagine, quick as

you may say one, two, three, knocked me breathless who was already breathless, racking the cask's frame, and battering me back, so to say, out of my death into sense. And or ever I could lend half a thought to this mystery of motion-on-the-horizontal down by the ocean's bottom, I was hounded on to a mystery still more astounding—a sound in the realm of muteness—a roar—that very

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soon grew to a most great and grave tumult. During which growth of tumult I got the consciousness of being rushed through some tunnel, for the concussions of the cask on every side came fast and more frightfully faster; and I now made out, how I cannot tell, that the direction of my race was half horizontal, and half downward, toward the source of that sounding. How long the trip lasted my spirit, spinning in that thundering dark, could hardly sum up: it might have been a minute or five, a mile or twenty: but there came a moment when I felt the Portugal lifted up, and tossed; it was spinning through space; and it dropped upon rock with a crash which ravished me from my consciousness.

So intemperate was this mauling, that upon returning to myself after what may have been many hours, I had no doubt but that I was dead; and within myself I breathed the words: "The soul is an ear; and Eternity is a roar."

For I appeared at present to be a creature created with but one single sense, since, on placing my fingers an inch afore my face, in vain I strained my vision to trace them; my body, in so far as I was any longer cognizant thereof, was, as it were, lost to me, and blotted out; so that I seemed to be naught but an ear, formed to hear unceasingly that tumult that seemed the universe: and anew and anew I mused indolently within me: "well, the soul is an ear; and Eternity is a roar."

Thus many minutes I lay, histing with interest to the tone of the roar, the which hath with it a shell's echoing that calleth, making a chaunting vastly far in the void, like an angel's voice far noising. What

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proved to me that I was disembodied was the apparent fact that I was no longer in the portugal, since I at present breathed free; nevertheless, upon becoming conscious in the course of time of a stench of sea-brine, and presently of the mingling therewith of the Portugal's stink of pork, I

straightway felt myself to be living flesh; and, on reaching out my fingers, felt the sufficient reason of my breathing, to wit, that the Portugal's bottom had been breached in, and a hoop there started by his fall, for the staves' ends at that part at present spread all asprawl. I was prostrate upon my back, and the drado and broken Portugal's bottom lay over my legs, so that the portugal must have toppled over on his side after striking on his end.

The next circumstance that I now observed was a trembling of the ground on which I lay, the which trembled greatly, as with a very grave ague.

I set myself then to talk with myself, recalling, not without an effort of my memory, the certain facts of my predicament: to wit, firstly, that I had been cast in a cask from a bark called the *San Matteo*, not less than a century agone, I thought; I had then beyond doubt gone down toward the bottom of the sea; here some sea-river had undoubtedly seized and reeled me through some tunnel beneath the sea's base: and the under-tow of this sea-river's suction it was which must have occasioned that basin-like appearance of the sea's surface with a circular working, observed by me some moments before my going in the portugal. This salt torrent, having caught my cask, must have hurtled me through the tunnel to a hollow hall or vault in the bowels of the earth

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at the tunnel's mouth, and had then hurled the Portugal from the tunnel's mouth down upon some rock in the grotto, and so broken the Portugal's bottom. The cave must contain the air which it had shut in in the age of the convulsion of nature which had made it a cave, peradventure ere the sea was there, thus permitting me to breathe. And the roar that was roaring should be the thundering of the ocean tumbling down the walls of the hall from out the tunnel's mouth, the preponderousness of which thundering's dropping down occasioned that ague of the ground which was shaking me.

So much I could well sum up; also, from that echo's humming, whose vast psalmodying haunts the waterfall's thunder, I judged that the hollowness of the hall must be large beyond thought. More than this I understood not; but, this being understood, I covered my face, and gave myself to lamenting: for, ever and again, together with the thunder and his echo, worked certain burstings and crashes of the cataract, brief belchings breaching on a sudden, troubling the echo with yet huger rumours, madding sad to hearken to; and my hand could I not descry, stared I never so crazily

nigh; and the ague of the ground was, as it were, a shivering at the shout of God-Omnipotent's mouth: so that sobs gobbled forth of my bosom, when I understood the pathos of this place.

On throwing my hands over my eyes to cry, I felt on them a slime crass with granules,* perhaps splashed upon me through the open end of the Portugal on his tumble, the which when I had brushed

* In MS. "grains Globigerina ooze.

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away, with much anguish I got my head round to where my feet had been. No doubt had I but I should of necessity perish of thirst and the dearth of food; but that I might come to my doom at liberty, I crept forth of my prison, as a chick from the rupture of his shell.

A tinder-box was in my pouch, but, in the swound of my comprehension, I did not then remember it, but moved in darkness over a slime with my arms outstretched, drenched ever with a drizzle, the source of which I did not know. Slow I moved, for I discovered my right thigh to be crushed, and all my body much mauled; and, or ever I had moved ten steps, my shoe stepped into emptiness, and down with a shout I sped, spinning, to the depth.

My falling was stopped by a splash into a water that was warm, into which I sank far; and I rose through it bearing up with me some putrid brute that drew the rheum of his mucus over my face. I then struck out to swim back to the island from whose cliff I had tumbled: for I saw that the cavern's bottom was occupied by a sea, or salt pond, and that upon some island in this sea the cask must have been cast. But my effort to get again to the island availed not, for a current which seized me carried me still quicker, increasing at the last to such a careering that I could no more keep me up over the waves; whereupon an abandonment of myself came upon me, and I began now to drown, yet ever grasping out, as the drowning do; and afore I swooned I was thrown against a shore, where, having clutched something like a gracile trunk, I dragged my frame up on a shore covered over with that same grainy

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slush, and tumbled to a slumber which dured, I dare say, two days.

I started awake with those waters in mine ear whose immortal harmony, I question it not, I will for ever hear in my heart; and I sat still, listing, afeared to budge, lest I should afresh blunder into trouble, while mine eyeballs, bereft of light, braved the raylessness with their staring. My feet lay at a sea's edge, for I could feel the upwashing of the waves, the which wash obliquely upon the shore, being driven by a current: but near as they were, I could hear ne'er a splash, nor anything could hear, except the cataract's crashing, joined with the voice of his own echoing, whose music tuneth with the thundering a euphony like that of lute-strings with drum ahumming, and anon the racket of those added crashings, when masses more ponderous of the cataract drop; and I did ever find myself histing with mine ear reached sideward, drawn to the darksome chaunting, forgetting my hunger, and the coming of death: histing I wot not how long, perhaps hours, perhaps night-longs: for here in this hall is no Time, but all is blotted out but the siren's sorrow that haunts it: and a hundred years is as one hour, and one hour as a hundred years.

I remarked, however, immediately, that the waves which washed my feet were not warm like that part of the water where I had fallen into the lake; so that I understood that the lake is a cauldron of different temperatures at different parts, the waters which roll in from the ocean being cold, but the lake warmed by flames beneath the cave: indeed, each region of the cave, so far as my feet ever reached

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in it, is always warm to the hand, and the atmosphere warm, though thick, and sick with stinks of the sea.

After a long while I found the tinder-box within my pouch, wherein also I found a chisel which I was bringing to my house to sharpen on the night of my capture, and also a small gar or gimlet. So I struck a flash that cut mine eyes like a gash, and I kindled a rag, the which glowed a rich gore-colour upon an agitated water rushing past the shore; and although only a small region of the dark was lit up, I could see sufficient of the shore's sweep to understand that I was standing on a mainland made of granite, but not altogether without marl on the ground, nigh behind me being a grove of well-formed growths resembling elms, all gnarled and venerable, yet no taller than my belly, although some do come to my neck. Their leaves be milk-white, and even of a quite round shape, and they do for ever shake themselves with the ground that shakes, and produce a globose fruit, the

which is blanched, too, and their boles pallid. I saw long afterwards another dwarf of just the same shape, only his fruit oozeth a juice like soap's water, that maketh a lather.* On the lake also I have lately seen by the torch's light near the island a weed with leaves over two yards long, the which be caused to float on the water by small bladders attached to it;† and also in the marshy spot by the promontory is the forest of bulrushes, that show a tuft, or plume, at their summit, and they do shake themselves, their stem being about three feet high, and they shoot out a single root that

* Agave?

† Some sort of Macrocystis.

groweth visible over the ground seven feet or more in his length,* besides which, I observed none other shrubs, save a pale purple fungus, well-nigh white, growing on these rocks where I write, and in the corridor which is on this side of the pond of pitch.

But in that minute's glimmering, while my rag's light was dancing on the waves, I knew what super-abundance of food lay for me in this place, to be had by only putting forth of my hand: for in that paltry area of the water I saw pale creatures like snakes seven or eight feet long, tangled together in a knot, and some more alone, and four globose white beings, so that I could see that the lake is alive with life; and they lay there quite unaware of the light that pried on their whiteness, so that I decided that they be wights deprived of eyes. A very long time later on, probably many years, I came upon the stream to the lake's left, by the promontory, the which is thronged with oysters, with many sorts of pearl, and conch shells: but at the first I saw it not.

To have the creatures of the lake, I take stand to my knees in the water's margin (for farther I may not enter for the strength of the current), lean forward with the torch, and abide the coming of the creature of my liking, the which resembles the creatures called a trunk-fish in the tropics, being of triangular form, with freckles. The species of the creatures of the lake be few, though their number great; and, as all the plants be very pigmy, so all the animals be of great bigness, save one thing resembling a lizard, a finger in his length, that I have seen on the

* Some dwarf papyrus, or papyrus-like sedge.

reefs, and his tail is formed in the shape of a leaf, and engorgeth itself grossly, and it gazeth through great globose eyeballs that glare lidless,* but they be blind eyeballs; and one only wight of the lake hath eyes, but they do hang by a twine out of his eye-sockets, and dangle about his countenance, and be blind. As to their catching, this I managed at starting without so much as a torch, but by the touch alone; nor do their sluggish natures struggle against my grabbing, but by their motions I understand the wonder that they have what creature he might be who removeth them from their secret home. The flesh of one and all is soft and watery, yet cruel tough, and crude to the tongue. My repasts at starting were ate raw; but afterwards I made fires with the tree-trunks, the which being dry-timbered, I could chop down with the chisel and a rock for my hammer. Later on when I did find out the rock-hall, I laid my fire there: but almost all the rags of my garments, except my jerkin, had been burned up for tinder, before I unearthed the marsh of bulrushes, whose pith served me from thenceforth both for tinder and food, and at present also for parchment: for, boiled in the hot rivulet in the rock-hall, the pith and fish together giveth an excellent good food, when, being voided of moisture, and pounded, they become a powder or flour; so that when I had once come at the bulrushes, where, too, are the oysters, being put upon the plan of boiling, I no more roasted my food as before.

For what appeared a long period, as it were long weeks, I mollified my thirst by soaking my body on

* Gecko?

the shore's verge, where the waves break; but thirst became a rage in my throat, like that lust of light in mine eyes, so that sometimes, pronouncing a shout, I did desperately drench my bowels, drinking my fill of the bitterness, the which, I am convinced, is more bitterer than the bitterness of the outer sea. By this time I had roamed exploring far around that part of the shore on which I was cast up, and had found about me a boundless house of caves, chambers, corridors, with dwarf forests, and stretches of sponges of stone, boulders, and tracts of basalt columns, a fantastic mass to me of rock and darkness, all racked, and like the aspen dancing, to the farthest point of my wandering, all inhabited by the noise of the waters' voice, and stinking of the sea with so raw a breath, that in several spots the

nostrils scarce can bear it. There be shells of many shapes and dimensions upon the land, many enamelled with gems and pearl, sea-urchins also, starfish, sea-cucumbers, and other sea-beasts with spines, mussels nigh to the promontory on the lake's left, corals, and many kinds of sponges, many monstrous huge and having a putrid stench, some, as it were, sponges of stone, others soft, and others of lucid glass, painted gallant with hues of the rainbow, and very gracious shaped, as hand-baskets, or ropes of glass, but crude of odour. Till I had set up my hearth in the rock-hall, I rambled about without any torch, for the cause that I knew not yet well the inflammable mood of the wood, nor had yet tumbled upon the sulphur, nor the pitch, with which to lard the torches; and, walking dark, with just a flash anon, I did often count my footsteps, it might be

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to a thousand, or two, till tired out. But spite of my ramblings, my body had knobs like leprosy, and was lacerated with my scratching, and racked with the rushing through me of the salt draughts which I drank, afore ever I chanced upon fresh water. That day I descended by three great steps that are made as by men's hands, and that lie peradventure half a mile from the lake, into a basalt hall, vastly capacious, so that forty chariots could race abreast therein; and the walls be as straight as the walls of masons, the roof low, only some twenty foot aloft, flat and smooth and black, and at the remote end of it a forest of basalt columns stands. There I marked that the air was even warmer than the warm air near the lake, and it was not long ere I had advanced into a hot steaming, with a sulphur stench, the which I had no sooner perceived than I fell upon my hands over a heap which proved, when I had struck a flash, to be slushy sulphur. I also saw a canal cut through the floor across the rock-hall's breadth, as regular as if graved there, this being two feet deep, as I discovered, and two feet across, through which canal babbled a black brook, bubbling hot, the floor on each bank of the canal being heaped with sulphur. I had soon scooped up some of the fluid with the tinder-box, and upon his cooling somewhat, I discovered it to be fresh, though sulphurous, and also tarry, in his taste; and thenceforth I had it always cooling in rows of conch shells by the rock-hall's left wall.

And during all the years of my tarrying in this tomb, the rock-hall hath become, in some manner, my home. There, in a corner nigh the three steps,

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I made up a fire; I put round it stones, and over the stones a slab, and plaiting my beard into my hair behind me, I there broiled my meat, until the time when I took to boiling the mixed trunk-fish and bulrush in the canal's boiling brook; and for a long while I kept the fire ever fed with wood from the tiny forests: for that I loved his light.

But, as to light, I have nineteen times beheld it in this dark from other causes than mine own fires, seventeen times the light being lightning: for lightning I must call it, the land lightning like the sky: and this I understand not at all.* But I was standing by the water's margin, bent upon catching my white blindlings, when the cavern became far and wide as it were an eye that wildly opened, winked five million to the minute, and as suddenly closed; and after a minute of thick darkness as afore, it opened once more, quick quivered, and closed. And there all ghast I stayed, in my heart's heart the ghast thought: "Thou, God, Seest Me." But though mine eyes staggered at the glare, I fancy that in fact it was but faint, and the ghost only of a glare, for of the cave's secrets little was thereby revealed unto me: and sixteen times in like wise his wings have quivered, and the wildness of his eye hath stared at me like the visitations of an archangel: and twice, besides, I have beheld the cave lighted by the volcano.

But it was long before ever the volcano came that I fell in with the mescal: for it was no long time after that surprise of lightning that, in pacing once to the shore to take up some trunk-fish which I had

* Electric earth-storms.

thrown in the slush there—I think eight or twelve years may then have gone over me—I happened to bruise in my fingers one of the pigmy globose fruit, and there oozed out of it a milk that I put to my lips. It was bitter, but I did swallow some drops unawares, the result whereof was wondrous: for even ere I reached the beach, an apathy enwrapped my being; I let myself drop down by the breakers' brim; my brow and body collapsed in a lassitude; and my lips let out the whisper: "pour on: but as for me, I will know rest." I was thereupon lapped in trances the most halcyon and happy; the roaring rolled for me into such oratorios as my mouth may not pronounce, though I appeared, so to speak, to see, more than to hear, that music; and in the mean time mine eyes, fast closed, had afore them a universe of hues in slow movement and communion, hues

glowing, and hues ghostly and gnomelike, some of them new hues to me, so that I knew not at all how to call them, with cataracts of pomegranate grains pattering, waves of parrot green, wheels of raspberry reeling, dapplings of apple and pansy, pallid eyeballs of bile and daffodil, pellucid tulips, brooks of rubies, auroras, roses, all awork in a world earnester than Earth, that it were empty to attempt to tell of.

I had heard tell at San Juan of the shrub which they do name “the mescal button,” chewed by the Mexicans to produce upon them such revelations of hues; and I have concluded that this shrub of the cave must be of nature akin.* But though the gift of it transfigured that stink-pit beneath the sea into

* The mode of occurrence of mescal (above ground) is rather different from Saul’s plant, though the effects are identical.

a region of the genii for me, I was aware that to munch thereof was presumptuous, for the troubles that his rancour bringeth upon the body of men were quickly obvious upon me. But I made never an attempt to abandon his happiness, for it wheeleth through the brain to so sweet a strain, and talketh such gossip to the organs of the consciousness, as I do not suppose to be true of the very lotus, nor of that pleasant root that is known as nepenthe.

I have spent years on years, nay, as it seems to me, eras on eras, in one dreaming by the sea’s rim, while my soul, so to speak, passed into the cataract’s inmost roar, and became as one therewith. I lay there naked, for at first I had preserved my jerkin and shirt to serve for tinder, until I tumbled upon the discovery of the bulrush-pith, whereupon I employed the jerkin and shirt to contain the pith and fish for their boiling; so after the last of my trouse’s rags had shredded from around my legs, and my shoes, too, from my feet, through great periods of time I have lain there naked, though enveloped to my belly in my hair and beard, idly dreaming, finding it too dreary a trial to seethe my food, and often eating raw, having long agone let the fire in the rock-hall go out. In the end I have shirked even the burden of bending in the sea’s surf, or of journeying to the mussel stream, to get at my grub, and will spend considerable periods with never a bit other drink or meat than that bitter-sweet milk of the mescal.

From this life of sloth twice only have I been disturbed by fright, the first time when the volcano came, the second time when I observed the increasing

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dearth of air to breathe; and on each occasion I was spurred to take torch and search further afield than e'er before what the vault holds—in both searches meeting with what turned out serviceable to my needs: for in the first search I butted on the bulrush bush, which I believe I butted on years ere I observed this increasing dearth of air; and it was the increasing dearth of air which sent me peering further a second time, and then I saw the pond of pitch. This latter is beyond the forest of basalt columns at the far end of the rock-hall; and it was in passing to it through those columns that I saw the beast's bones, that be bigger, I believe, than several elephants together, although the beast resembles an elephant, having straight tusks, exceeding long; and his jaw hath six huge teeth, very strange, every several tooth being made of littler ones, the which cling about it like nipples; and there among those pillars his ribs may have rested for many a century, some of them being now brittle and embrowned; and beyond the pillars is a passage, perfectly curved, having a purplish fungus growing upon his rock; and beyond the passage is a cavern than whose threshold I could no farther advance, for the bed thereof is a bitumen sea, which is half-warm and thick at the brink, but, I think, liquid hot in the middle; and all over his face broods a universe of rainbows, dingy and fat, which be from the fat vapours of the pitch bringing forth rainbows, not rainbows of heaven, but, so to say, fallen angels, grown gross and sluggish. But years ere this, I think, I had seen the bulrushes: for, soon after the volcano came, in roaming over the left shore of the cataract's sea—the which left shore

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is flat and widespread, and hath no high walls like the right side—I walked upon a freshet of fresh warm water, and after following it upward, saw all round a marsh's swamp, and the bush of bulrushes. This is where the oysters be so crass, and they be pearl oysters, for all that soil be crass with nacreous matter of every sort, with barrok pearls, mother-of-pearl, and in most of the oysters which I opened pearls, with a lot of conch shells that have within them pink pearls, and there be also the black pearl, such as they have in Mexico and the West Indies, with the yellow and likewise the

white, which last be shaped like the pear, and large, and his pallor hath a blank brightness, very priceless, and, so to say, bridal. As to the bulrush, his trunk is triangular (like the trunk-fish), some five inches wide at the bottom, and giveth a white pith good for food. I came, moreover, upon the discovery after a long time that, since this pith lieth in layers, these, being steeped in water, and afterwards dried, do shrink to a parchment, quite white and soft, but tending to be yellow and brittle in time.

But for these two adventures, first to the bulrushes, and then to the pond or sea of pitch, I cannot remember that that long trance I had by the shore was broken by any excursion. But I had a rough enough rousing in that hour when, upon opening mine eyes, I beheld, not the old darkness, but all the hall disclosed in scarlet, and felt the cavern in movement, not with that proper trembling that I knew, due to the preponderousness of the cataract's mass over the earth's fabric, but racked with an earthquake's racking: and when mine eyes, now shyer

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than the night-bird's, recovered their courage, I observed the sea's whole surface heaved up like sand-heaps, dandled up with the earthquake's dancing. Now also for the first time I saw aloft to my right the tunnel's monstrous mouth, out of which the cataract's mass tumbleth down, the mouth's top rim being rounded, like the top lip of a man's mouth crying aloud. I saw also the cataract rolling hoary across his whole breast's breadth, woolly with flocks and beards of froth, as it were Moses' beard, except at the centre, where it gallops glassy smooth and more massy, for there the sea cometh out from the tunnel's inwards to stretch itself out in that mouth that shouteth aloud. I saw also the roof life a rufous sky of rock, and right before mine eyes lay an island, long and narrow, upon the which I had been cast at the first, for there yet lay the portugal on the right end of the island, that right end lying quite nigh the cataract, and the island's left end some twenty yards from the lake's left end. And I saw the lake in his entirety by spying over the island's centre, where the land lies low, the lake having an egg's form, perhaps two miles in his length, I being at the egg's small end. I saw also that the cave's right side, where the wall rises sheer, is washed directly by the lake's wheeling career; and since the cataract there crashes down, along that right side I cannot advance; nor along the cave's left side can I advance so much as a mile, for there a headland juts out into the lake, dividing that side of the cave into two great rooms. I saw also nigh

the far shore of the lake four more small islands of rock, and I was shewn, from the lake's ocean-like aspect, that his waters be vastly

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profound, his bottom being doubtless housed far down in the planet's bowels. All was lit up. And some distance beyond the lake's far boundaries I saw the mouth of some cave, through which came up a haze of radiance sparkling, and vaulting stones, and therewith some tongues of flame, which now showed, and now withdrew their rouge.

I gathered that some volcanic action was going on under the cavern, and as I there stayed, agape at it, I saw arise out of the lake in the remote distance, and come toward me, a thing, with the which I so long had lived, and known it not. His body lay soft in curves on the billows nigh a furlong behind his uplifted head, and I could not fly, nor turn mine eyes from the pitifulness of his appearing in the light. His head and face be of the dimension of a cottage, having a shameful likeness to a death's-head, being bony, shiny, and very tight-skinned, and of a mucky white colour, with freckles. It hath a forehead and nose-ridge, but, where eyes should be, stands blank skin only; and it drew nigh me with the toothless house of his mouth wide open in a scream of fear, distrusting Him that made it: for the air was waxing still hotter, and it may have had an instinct of calamity, peradventure from some experience of the volcano's fierceness a century since. It travelled nigh under the island's right end through the cataract's foam, and then close under me, nor could see me look at his discovered nudity, nor could my rooted foot flee from it; and on it journeyed, circling the lake's surface with the dirge of his lamentation. Immediately after I lost my reason through the fierceness of the heat, and reeled; and when I came

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back to myself the cave was as black as ever. And once again, long afterwards, I saw flames flutter in the cave beyond the lake, a grey dust rained over the lake's face, the great creature arose, and a grove of the trees at this end were sered with heat; but since then the event has never been seen.

But it was soon subsequent to this second convulsion that I made an observation: to wit, that unless I was well under the rule of the mescal fruit —when I do scarce seem to breathe—I became aware of an oppression of the chest. And this grew with me; so that I began to commune within me,

saying: “Though the cavern be vast, the air that it containeth must be of limited volume, and I have inhaled it long: for whereas when I hither came I was a young thing, I am now old. My lungs have day by day consumed the wholesome air; and the day approacheth when I must surely perish.”

At the commencement it was only when I lay me to rest that the trouble oppressed me, but, sat I up, it passed; then after, if I sat, it oppressed me; but, stood I up, it passed: so that I understood it to be so that a lake of noxious vapour lay at the bottom of the air of this place, a lake due to my breathing, that each year grew in depth and noxiousness, the longer I breathed: this vapour having a sleepy effect, not happy like the mescal’s, but highly unhappy, making me nightmares and aches of my body. In the beginning I got relief by going to live in other regions than in the rock-hall and on the beach: but in every direction my way hath now been blocked, for I have now inhabited in turn every cranny of the cavern whereto I am able to penetrate, and the

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vapour is in all, troubling also the shrubs of all sorts, the which let fall their heads, and shed their health. There remain some coigns among the rockeries, wherein, when I toil aloft to them, I may yet breathe with some freedom; but that my days are numbered I know. My God! my God! why hast Thou created me?

But soon after understanding the manner of my undoing, I began to argue in myself as regards the cavern and his architecture as never formerly, arguing that whereas so great volumes of water came in, and the vault was not filled, there must needs be some outlet for an equal volume to flow out. I was led to conjecture that the tunnel which admits the sea into the cavern is at some sea-mountain’s summit; that the cavern must be in the mountain’s bowels; and that the outflow out of the cavern must be down another much longer tunnel, leading down to the mountain’s bottom into the sea.* I therefore conceived the notion that, if I could reach the portugal, get it repaired, and, in it, introduce myself into the tunnel of outflow (the which I knew to be beyond the headland on the lake’s left, where the lake’s two wheeling currents meet), then I should be carried down and out into the bottom of the sea, should thereupon rise to the sea’s surface—for the unweighted portugal would certainly float with me—and there I might bore a hole or two in the Portugal’s upper belly for air, and be picked up by a ship before my stores were done, and before my death from

* This is shrewd: the two tunnels and lake thus acting as a syphon, and the compressed air acting as what in hydrostatics we call a “pocket.” This, in fact, is the only hypothesis—except the hypothesis that the tunnel of outflow emerges upon dry land, there forming a salt lake or river, like the Sardinian *salines*.

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hunger or suffocation, I being well drugged with the mescal, and so but little breathing or eating. As to introducing myself into the tunnel of outflow, nothing more was necessary than to get the portugal to the headland’s end, get myself into it, and roll myself in the portugal from the headland’s end into the lake: where the currents would not fail to bear me toward the place of outflow, and I should be sucked down into the tunnel.

I meditated that the stupendousness of the attempt in no fashion lessened my chance: for that laws will act exactly on the immense scale as on the small. The portugal I could get to by going into the lake at the egg’s-point of the lake, whence the current would carry me away along the left shore toward the inland, the left end whereof I might catch by continually swimming strong to the right; and lest I should be dashed to fragments in my grand journey through the tunnel, I determined to pad the Portugal’s inside with the bulrush pith; and moreover I devised a sliding-door in the Portugal’s side, the which when I should reach the sea’s surface would be furnishing me with breathing: in the making whereof I did not doubt but that my former craft in carpentry would help me out. That I might be struck blind by the moon’s brightness, and surely by the sun’s, upon opening mine eyes up there above I reflected: but I price eyes as of but paltry value to a man, and should estimate it no hardship to dispense with mine, such as they are. On the whole, I had no fear; and the reason of my fearlessness, as I at present perceive, lay in this: that in my heart I never at all intended to attempt the venture. It

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was a fond thought: for, granting that I got out, how could I live without the cataract? I should surely die. And what good were life to me there in the glare of day, without the mescal’s joys, and without the secret presence of the voice, and the thing which it secretly shouteth? In such separation from the power of my life I should pass frailly away as a spectre at day-break: for by the power of the voice is my frail life sustained, and thereon I hang,

and therein I have my being. And this in my soul I must have known: but in the futile mood that possessed me, I made three several attempts to gain the portugal, terrified the while at mine own temerity; and twice I failed to make the left end of the island, for the current carried me beyond—toward the tunnel of outflow, I doubted not; yet were my terrors not of that horror mainly, but of the monster in the lake's depth, the which stayeth there pale and pensive, mediating his meditations: for I knew that if my foot or hand just touched his skin, I must assuredly reel and sink, shrieking mad, since I swam dark, but having an unlighted torch in my hand, the tinder-box being tied within my beard; and the first twice I was hurled to land upon the headland, but the third time upon the island's left end, the rock of which I clambered up with my hands lacerated by shells. And after lighting the torch, I wrought my steps toward the island's right end; and there lay the portugal even as I had left it twenty, forty, years ago, the slime on his side yet wet from the water-fall's aura that haunts the island. And in that spot I saw, not the portugal alone, but moreover a sword's hilt, a human skull, and a clock's

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racket, thither tossed by the cataract. The portugal was still good, for the pitch which is on it: and having cast out the drado by an effort of all my strength, I struck out four of the nails from the three bottom pieces that had been sprung, nailed the three pieces, and the broken hoop of wood, too, to the side of the portugal, and so consigned the portugal to the waters, the which, I was assured, would bear it to the small end of the lake's egg-shape, as they had borne me upon mine ancient fall from the island.

But I had myself no sooner been spued again upon the mainland, more dead than alive, and there found the portugal stranded, than I knew myself for a futile dreamer, wearying myself without sincere motive: for that I should really abandon the cavern was a thing not within the capability of nature. And there by the shore's edge I left the portugal lying a good while, abiding for the most part upon the crags of these rocks that be like gradients on the right side of the hall, until that day when it was suggested to my spirit how strangely had been given me both ink and paper in this place, the knowledge moreover how to get the portugal forth of the grot with a history of that thing which my God in song hath murmured unto me, having furtively hid me with His hand, though a seraph's pen could never express

it; nor could I long resist the pressure of that suggestion to write, and send forth the writing in the portugal.

For the Portugal's mending I had the gimlet, the chisel, mescal-timber, and some of the nails from the sprung bottom, which could be spared; nor was the job hard, since the one started hoop could be

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nicely spliced. I rolled and got the portugal up to this level ground in the rocks, surrounding myself, as I wrought, with tarred torches, which I stuck in the rocks' cracks: for down below it is reluctantly if a fire will now burn; and at this height also the torches do burn with shy fires.

Or ever the portugal was repaired, I had got ready the pages for writing, having divided fifteen of the bulrush piths into strips, then wetted, and dried them; but there be spongy spots in them where the lampblack that I have manufactured out of the pitch runneth rather abroad under the splint of fish-bone that serves for my pen, hurting the fairness of my writing. That I could write at all I rather doubted, on the count that I have not for so long handled pen nor spoken, and on the count moreover of the trembling: for not only the pen trembleth by reason of mine age, but the parchment trembleth by reason of the vault's trembling; and between these two tremblements, in a sick sheen which flickers ever, these sheets have, letter by letter, been writ. The fifteen sheets of pith, moreover, have proved too little, and I am writing now on the second of two sheets that are sections of a fish's skin.

But now it is finished: and I send it out, if so be a fellow in the regions above may read it, and know. My name, if I have not yet writ it down, was James Dowdy Saul; and I was born not far from the borough of Bideford in the county of Devon.

My God! My God! why hast Thou created me?

I ask it: for the question ariseth of itself to my mind because of the crass facts of my predicament; yet my heart knoweth it, Lord God, to he the

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grumble of an ingrate: for a hidden thing is, that is winniger than wife, or child, or the shining of any light, and is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man findeth, he selleth all, and buyeth that field; and I thank, I do thank Thee, for Thy voice, and for my lot, and that it was Thy will to

ravish me: for the charm of Thy secret is more than the rose, exceeding utterance.

* * * *

On the telling of this tale, he who had clapped was clapped, for all were conscious how poignantly apt to the darkened Joy was this romance of darkness and psalmody; and applause from all rapped as directly out as cracklings track the electric spark—from all, except from Joy Richards, who, for her part, sat with her back to the arbour, her brow hanging down, while out of her eyes, drop after drop, spattered water upon her lap. This Bates happened to see, and would not see: his face-muscles convulsed one moment at his emotion, then up he leapt to swagger laggardly with pocketed paws out of the grotto, pale, as if offended with everyone.

CHAPTER XI

AS the next was again a glorious day, the picnic trip to Les Cascades, the Comté de Pichegrue-Picard's château, was made—an old-time home embowered in the bosom of mountains, and crowded with curios, which Joy could see with her fingers, and hear the waters' noising, for she was not without eyes in her fingers, eyes in her ears, and could see sound. She selected Sir John Hay to be with her and her aunt in the motor-car which took them—Hay, the last of the tale-tellers—and she was in such high spirits with him that a Miss Garry remarked to Miss Clode: "How if last turn out to be first? How she nibs to him!—to quote one Shakespeare

"Tom Bates! Tom Bates!" Miss Clode groaned.

"Or—Fragson," Miss Garry suggested: "or—Pascal; or—Hardacre; or any of them: we don't know her heart."

"Long Tom!" went Miss Clode.

"Yet I have noticed in her a decided preference for Hay," the other said: "Joy was born, spent her early girlhood, on those same Cumbrian braes from which he gets his brawn, his brogue, and that something of mournfulness about his brown eyes."

"Tom Bates!" Miss Clode said again.

"Oh, well, we shall soon know: I only hope I shall prove to be distantly related to the happy man..."

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What a prize-story competition! Four million pounds *and* a pair of coral earrings..."

Meantime, Miss Clode's "selection," Bates, was making himself quite scarce, as though shy of having done something guilty—was missing when they got to Les Cascades, and was discovered to have remained at home, though his "Saul" must have been recalled to Joy by that noise of Les Cascades waters, close to which she loitered half the forenoon, voiceless, hearkening.

Then when they were back in the afternoon, and in the arbour once more, Sir John Hay stood with folded arms by the balcony close beside the blindling's chair, bowed to the ladies, and, frowning his brown brows, began to relate

THE TALE OF ADAM AND HANNAH.

You may somewhere have heard, ladies, some word of the tale of Adam and Hannah? Anyway, this is it—not fully given, but as given at the inglesides of Hilly England some midnight during some hundred Yules, or more.

Now, Hannah being a Lowther, and Adam a Yerburg, and Lowther and Yerburg having long been at feud, if Adam loved Hannah, that is an old story, older than Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," which Shakespeare was never capable of inventing; an old story, and a true: for where love is a prohibited thing, love will be pretty prone to spring. But the story of Adam and Hannah is not only old and true, but new, too.

It occurred about Kirkdale, where Lowther and

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Yerburg were the main maister-men o' the dale, the Yerburgs being "statesmen" (yeomen), the Lowthers lords of the Hall; and the feud, it is asserted, grew out of some yearning of the Hall to grab some fragment of the land of Ghyll How, the Yerburg farm. Whatever its origin, seldom a year went by from the date of that trouble that failed to breed some grievance or other to add oil to the conflagration: until at last we see existing a malignity as fixed as law of God—no uncommon thing still among Cumbrian brothers of an old-time tone.

Well, about 1775 the then head of the Yerburgs—a certain Seth Yerburg, or "Seth o' Ghyll"—found himself in debt, the Yerburgs being a set as bereft of frugality as they were arrogant, and never too well-to-do. Anyway, Seth had now to mortgage to a Keswick man-of-affairs a corner of Ghyll How, whose lands extended quite from the corries and ghylls of Rocscar Head down to the lowland mere near the dale's centre; and the man tramped back broken-hearted that day to the old homestead of slate-stone buried in roses and red-berried briony, for holy ground in Yerburg eyes were those rugged grounds of Ghyll How.

It was little odd, then, that some months later, Seth o' Ghyll, now a man of fifty, ground grass between his teeth on gathering that his mortgage-deeds had been bought up by Jacob Lowther from the Keswick man-of-affairs: for the Lowther had pounced upon the chance, and at last a fragment of the Ghyll lands was in the grasp of the adversary.

However, Seth was not long left without solace.
For, only four days later, a retainer happened to

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drop a lamp up at the Hall in the dark of the morning: and presently shepherds out on the fells, reckoning the black-visaged herdwicks at t'edge o' t'daylight for their morning bath in the becks, marked far away on those western heights of the Hall a dawn of fire. From them the news flew; soon almost all the dalesfolk were crowding on the Hall's lawns, gazing at the conflagration; and in the crowd's midst the Lowther, a little man of fifty-six, sat in a sedan-chair, dandified to his satin small-clothes, his buckles, his ruffles, brushing his nostrils with snuff, watching that burning as unconcernedly as he watched that bowl of worlds burning over Kirkdale. But when a big figure, grim of beard, presently appeared, pressing his way toward the building through the thick of the crowd, then the laird's brows raised themselves in amazement at the daring of Seth Yerburg's foot, and lightning flew out of his eyes, as Yerburg stood and eyed him with lightning flying out of his.

It was during this mutual look that a woman appeared shrieking at a window—too high to jump down, although the house was low—one of those Cumbrian homesteads, widespread, with porches—and close behind her was fire, smoke by this time fuming out of most of the openings, stooping anon to kiss with soot the jam of humans all mixed with horses and cattle snatched from “stands” and shippions.

At Mr. Lowther's command a body of the crowd ran to the back to seek a ladder to rescue the screamer—a housemaid who had been asleep; but ere these could have reached the back, Yerburg o'

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Ghyll had jerked off his jacket, and, to the astonishment of all, had dashed into the Hall.

It is not known whether his motive was to save the maid, or to do what he did do; both motives may have moved him: at any rate, when he had run the blockade of flame on the staircase, his next rush was not directly toward the shrieking maid, but obliquely off toward a certain corridor, a certain door, already crackling; he drove his back at this door, till it broke in; stepped then down four steps; and now, in a chamber known to be a special den of the Lowther, found what he hoped—a coffer of oak. The key was

sticking in it: and within some minutes—crammed for him with a racket of combustion, cataracts of tumbling beams sounding about his ears—he had the coffer's contents of plate, “bank-bills,” money.

Of these he made a bundle on the floor, and only then left them to rush in the direction of the shrieks, which he could hear a little through the din. But on being cast backward by a blast of heat, back again he ran, abandoning the maid, to the chamber of riches, gathered the mass in his arms, ran now toward the house-back, and, cracking a lattice with his back, sprang thirty feet to the earth. His leap was neither seen nor its clatter noticed, owing to the cattle lowing at the front, and to the intentness of everyone upon the efforts that were being made to save the maid: so, still a nimble and “buirdly” gallant, Seth o’ Ghyll gathered himself and his wealth together, and was away, everyone by this time imagining that he had perished in the fire, a smile of malice now stamped on the mouth of the Lowther.

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Yerburg then spurted for the stables, not yet well aburn, got a spade, and now was off again down a lonnin, away from the house, hugging his gold, across a board-bridge over a beck, by a pheasantry, and up across a meadow at the foot of Rindscarth, odours of new peats now in his nostrils, and in his ears a torrent’s roar dropping over the fellside: for by this time he had raced a great way, to a point whence the conflagration resembled the inflammation of a boil malign on the night’s breast.

At the top of that meadow he entered a forest of alders on the fellside, and, moving through long grass that grew luxuriant there, came to a depression in the ground, twenty-five feet wide, named the “Giant’s Grave,” in it standing two of those druidical rocks known as “standing-stones,” five yards apart, supposed to mark the giant’s head and foot—a spot not often visited by a foot, gloomy, of a gloomy mood, where no sunbeam comes: so that Yerburg had need to work steel-and-flint to fix the exact middle between the standing-stones. There he began to dig, and having got a three-foot grave, placed the paper-money in one of two gold chalices, bound its mouth up with his handkerchief, then buried and covered up everything.

During the doing of which a delicious shivering of maliciousness shook him’: he was all in debt, Lowther held mortgages on Ghyll How ground; but here was Lowther money, secret and sweet—not less than £2000, he

believed; his mouth muttered aloud, “Lowther gold buried in Lowther ground;” and he addressed the hoard, saying “Lowther gold, I devote you to Lowther undoing; let the secret of you go

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down from son to son; and if e'er one of our people have need of you to down a Lowther, he'll e'en know where to seek.”

He now stood up, and, once out of the wood, set off running again toward the conflagration, down the meadow, by the pheasantry, the beck, up the lonnin, past the stables, to the front; and when he appeared before the crowd by a miracle, a shout of cheering arose.

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We next see him an old fellow of over seventy, still hearty and hard, still handling the farm; his two sons dead in one day through an accident in a gullock; and his grandson, Adam, the sole hope remaining to the race.

This young Yerburg was a saturnine and hermit figure in Kirkdale, of whom men, met in gossip, would observe that Adam o' Yerburg's was a dintless bird, thinking himself aboon and beyond his own fowk. He had been to St. Bede's, and now at twenty-four was to be seen bent down over books under the rannel-tree shelf, wearing a sword with a genty air, standing aloof from shearing and harvest, from the pot of yal, the durdum dance. He had, besides, a habit of rambling the leelang night by scree and scar and furze, and heard the curlews skirl, pursuing what no one knew. Although sturdy as any Yerburg, with a face all jaw-bone and lumps of muscle, he was much smaller in stature than the grand gallants of his family; and, altogether, his grandfather regarded him with glances rather askance, misdoubtingly, as a fowl which hatches

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out an owl, yet cherished him also, last of the race left to wrestle it with the Hall.

That Hall had long been raised from its scorched foundations, and costlier raised; but the laird was so dragged away to Belgravia, that his grandchild, Hannah, had not seen it or the dale since her ninth year, till that night—she being then nigh on eighteen—when the Hall broke out into light from its old darkness and forlornness: and now a round of festal events, dinners, hunting parties, visitings, marked the homecoming of the old laird and the young lady. She herself, it was evident, was a famous one for the

saddle and pastimes, fished for eels in the mere, followed the fox: so that one evening at t' edge o' dark Adam Yerburg, at a turn of the path going to Granthet Edge beyond Glencorrie, had to throw himself upon the hedgerow from the rush of her hoofs, which, in galloping past, spat a spatter of gravel upon his forehead. Scowlingly in that second under his brown brows, as she dashed past, he observed that galloping flash of girlhood, her black plait slapping her back in spasms, she pallid and black like her stock, cold to look at, heartlessly haughty, the set of her head like a defiance of Heaven's self; whereas Yerburgs were a fair fowl, though burned brown in the face. And Adam muttered to himself "Aye, a Lowther all over;" and went on his way. As children they had seen each other through the tail of their eyes, as one may eye noisome snakes with a coy kind of avoidance.

From that day the rancour hereditary in Adam's breast against the Hall began to gangrene in his heart; and now Ghyll How hardly ever had his presence,

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save when at unholy hours he went home for a space from his morose roamings. His thoughts now were mostly of those mortgage-deeds which the Lowther held over a corner of Ghyll How—deeds which, although never redeemed, had never been put into execution, since that pleased Jacob Lowther's sense of power to hold it ever suspended over the heads of the foe: so that now the night-winds on the heights would sometimes snatch out of Adam's mouth mutters and hisses which hissed: "Foxes all! with their fair face and cocky ways; aye, well my fathers did to call ill on ye."

So he went on whetting his enmity, till that Sunday morning when, in passing through the kirkgarth, he marked a cavalcade canter up from the Hall, and drew back under the kirk's yew to observe. There was Sir Wilfrid Lyullph from beyond Brakescarth with his lady, and the old Marquess of Newlands escorting two daughters, and the Lowther with his near eighty years, as pale of countenance as stark drowned corpses, but still natty and erect in his silks and satins, whom Adam might have shot dead from the tree's shadow; and then the dandy Lord of Denedale, who, as all the dale was aware, was sweet on Hannah, and, leaning on his arm—Hannah, small, like all her family, her back bolt like a soldier, her chin's curves perfect patrician, like pretty princes' chins in visionary histories. And, as though the magnet of his gaze had power to drag her eyes to him, they moved round till she descried him under the yew, eyes that looked to him luminous

and huge like two pools of ink just spilled over the paleness of paper; and in the moment of that mutual gaze

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every trait of her being engraved itself in his brain and breast for ever—her nose dainty-clear like daisies, the nostrils thoroughbred, her breadth of forehead fair under hair whose blackness gave out glosses like a Mongol's mass. Quick, with a thief's feet, he spurted to peep after her into the kirk, saw the people stand, followed her advance up under those old roof-timbers straight from the tree, little square lead-lights, past the petty pulpit, till she sat in her pew in the chancel; then headlong he went, the fiend in his feet, away up toward the corries of Glencorrie; and "Aye," he murmured, and again "Aye," murmuring that of their murderous faces hers was the worst.

Ten days thence he was up on the summit of Rindscarth at sunset—one of those Lake days that are like days of crystalline, the dale stretching one vision of peach-tints at his feet, staring-clear, the fells purpling with serpent waves of heather working, with mites of kine on their heights standing out like cameos on the sky, and towering remotely in the clouds mountains like smoke. It was summer, the furzes now buzzing with a burden of bumblebees, mountain-tarns revealing all things down in their mirror's depths, while everywhere on the fellsides dropped long froths and oratories of torrents frolicking from rock to rock. Through all this Adam Yerburg was going his way upward, muttering, his steps hurried without purpose, with Lowther on the brain, when all at once Hannah Lowther was with him, tripping downward, swinging her hat by its strings, singing. He, for his part, staggered, and a dagger suddenly in his heart could hardly have struck the

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man to a ghastliness more ensanguined, while she, the path being rather narrow, appeared to pause and hang in fear an instant; an instant her eyes rested on his dead face; then, as he drew aside, and she stepped by him in haste, it was with her head bent slightly down. It might have been a bow; he was not sure if it was true that a blush flew to touch her face. As to her bow—if it was a bow—he did not bow back; but when she was gone from him, down he stumbled, like a man crushed, and "God," he groaned, "that such a thing should be!"

After that day he remained more at the home-farm, brooding on one of those benches named “skemmels” within the cavern of the ingle—a cavern of blue and white tiles in a chamber which was massive with wainscotting of oak ebonised by the smoke of ages; and now in the evenings, when the grandfather sat with him within that ingle, he would egg on the old statesman to go over again the wrongs that Yerburg had undergone from Lowther, concerned about details, murmuring anon “Fair-faced foxes!” “Ey, fox is their name, Adam, fox is their name, man,” the grandfather would answer, wondering at this sudden vigour of “the lad’s” malignity, understanding that something had happened to the lad, was about to happen, but doubtful in his heart about asking what...

It was on the last afternoon of July, when the sunset was shooting its last shot of light, and “St. John fires” were shining on the heights, that Adam Yerburg rowed his boat from the Ghyll side of Kirkdalewater over to the floating island; and night came upon him there, hidden within the island’s

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thicket of willows and alders, his thoughts so hot in his heart, that anon he laughed darkly, and anon wept scalding water of self-pity and self-scorn.

To be the faint slave of the detested! To fly white to death at a step! Ever the Lowthers were foxes, ever, without exception, foxes. But to be quelled in *this* way! Of his own free will to throw his own throat beneath her feet, and be feeling all day, all night, the craving that her shoe should crush him, so that, in dying, he might smile on the trifling tyrant-foot—a disgrace to his arrogant race, that, if Grandfather Yerburg but guessed at, he would spurn the grandson, and very properly, from his rannel-tree. Fatigued finally by his fierceness and fever, near nine in the night Adam tossed his body upon a bank of long-grass, and dropped asleep, his feet nearly at the mere’s brim, in his hair a night-wind that was wafting the island away to the Rindscarth side of the water.

At this hour Hannah Lowther also was on the water: for ever since the Hall had been empty of visitors, she, by a set of steps in the cliff, often stepped down to her skiff, to potter about beneath those burning skies of the nights of Kirkdale, giving up her ear to the mere’s gushing upon its shingle, seeing on its face, that mirrored the stars, a myriad little trails like tails of comets, and in the distance the village-lights shivering within it, hearing from some star, as it seemed, the bark of some barn-dog afar, a rook’s wing, a ringousel’s twitter, and on the negro mere the island twice-negro, sleep-

walking the water, the St. John fires long burnt out, nothing left in the spirit of Being but a rapture of rest, an

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astral trance, and the breath of Brahma-Father breathing "My peace I give to you." Listening to that stillness, Hannah lay pensive on her paddles, while nigher over her stole with ghostly glide the floating island, twenty-nine yards long (seven less than the Derwentwater one), waving the water's face away as a swan's breast waves it; and, at the sound of the breeze in its leafage, she, looking round, found it close over her. In a few moments now her bow butted among its bulrushes. And now, some yards from her, she noticed a boat fastened, then all at once saw under her eyes a man lying in a wild posture, like some wight tossing under chains with a flushed face: for, as the night was all informed with starlight, she could see, and went carmine, then was bloodless, half-standing in her boat, peeping at a Yerburg asleep, his fleece of curls, his heavy head; but when she set to pushing off, and her paddle slipped, to hit his foot hidden within rushes, instantly he was on his feet, peering at her.

She, very embarrassed, began to say "Forgive me——" while he, grinning a little, hissed at her, "*Miss Lowther!*" the wildest medley of frenzies widening his eyes.

"I regret——" she began to say again.

"*You here? You, a—— By God, what ill have I done you?"*

"Oh, no ill, Sir. I wish you a good-night."

Now his voice dropped to a sort of reproach, morose and choked with anguish: "You go from me? You do?"

She made no answer, raising up her paddle to go.

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"But you do not understand!" he cried: "It is all a lunacy!"

She looked up to ask: "What is?"

"It must be the high Christ," he cried, "who sent you here! You, a Lowther! No doubt I am stark mad in your eyes!"

"No, not mad. I must wish you a good-night, Sir."

As she now moved to put her paddle into the mere, down he dropped to his knees, and his fists met pounding on his chest, she, in distress at his turbulence, turning her face from side to side, murmuring: "I am sorry to

have caused you an incommodity, though I could scarce help it; and so I wish you a good-night, Sir."

Upon which he sprang passionately up with: "Ey, your fowk were ever foxes and entanglers!"

Now her chin lifted a little at him, as she answered: "That is false. Nor will I retort what I well might as to *yours*, but will wish you a more charitable frame of mind."

Whereupon her paddle patted the water, and her shell shot two yards away; but, as it darted, Adam was madly after it into the water: and since the island's edge shelves sharply, he was wet to his armpits when his hand grasped her gunwale, she shrinking to the other gunwale from him.

"Hear you shall!" his teeth chattered in a choky voice poignant with passion, that shook: "your eyes look pitying, your lips smile kind—blessed bliss!—you can't have a damned fox's-heart! I was happy and sane, look, till you came; and now you see, or dream, or guess, how I groan and grovel. You have seen, have you?"

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She, very distressed, as if sitting in nettles, said: "Will you let go my skiff?"

"No! I have you!" he answered masterfully; and instantly meek anew: "Oh, why did you come, dear light of my eyes? I die for you, your name is Hannah. But still, wot you? I'm glad you've come to intangle and do for me: for, look you, I ask nought of you but that you do me dead, if you but let my last blink be at your blessed, blessed face."

From her half-aversion she turned now sharply toward him, grumbling with a sort of harshness, gutturally: "Well, that is not much, after all, to ask;" and with her eyes bent meditatively upon his bent head under her, her breasts at present restless with breathlessness, she muttered afresh: "Last blink at my blessed face."

Upon which he, with gladness, glanced up to her to say: "Why, you are sorry for me, angel of heaven!"

"Oh, a girl of earth," she muttered sullenly to herself; and suddenly whispered, sick, with a catch of the breath which his ear could just catch the sick secret of—"who loves."

Now, as if a pistol had hit him, he sank limp, pressing on the skiff, so that she cranked, his head hanging like a man in shame. And thrice his

struggling gullet tried to get out “loves who?,” and then he gutturally said it.

And, as he said it, she turned her back on him with a girl-chuckle in her throat, and chucked backward a rose rent with trembling from her breast into his face.

Nothing then broke their dumbness during some

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moments but the bulrushes brushing one another, and the breezes through the bouquet of foliage, which floated them whither the winds listed, and one sob out of Adam. And suddenly his soul collapsed in a passion of sobbing like a child, his throat choking, his body bobbing, he sobbing broken-heartedly to her: “God above, you love not me?”

Again she gave her face to him, and, with that smile that saints smile in pain, raised her eyes a moment, as in prayer, to Boötes bending over them, saying: “Ah, as those stars are everlasting!”

“You love not me?” his gorge obstinately sobbed to her, with a gong’s hollowness.

She threw her hand then to brush his head consolingly where it lay bobbing on the boat, saying: “Oh, ‘tis even so, it appears, have no fear;” and she smiled upon him, saying: “Observe, now, Sir, that the Lowthers are no more entanglers than the Yerburgs!”

Now he lifted his head, and silently began to drag the skiff back to the island’s brink.

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Theirs was a flame that could scarce be veiled. The Grandfather Yerburg, with those brows of his that sharpened themselves as an old tailor peers at his needle’s eye, watched Adam, seeing all at once no longer the brooding boy, but a visage washed as in dews of joy, and thrice during August started out after “the lad” to give an eye; but, quickly distanced, slinked back winded. The other grandfather also up at the Hall began to be surprised at the vanishings and private business of his chick. And other eyes were active: so that the flagrant secret

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was getting near the day of revelation, though the pair, in their preoccupation, were as unconscious as the ostrich of it.

Their rendezvous was by two Druid yews which drooped together for age behind Rindscarth, and behind a Quaker chapel standing snow-white in its grove a good distance from the village, and in the ruins of the castle at Grenthet Edge, called Edge Down Tower; or through a whole forenoon they would sit together in purple of foxglove, watching the hills' hotch-potch of tints perfectly pictured in Kirkmere; or they would sigh together in t' gross o' night within that grove of the floating island.

At least half of their talk, meanwhile, was made up of phrases of consolation, they pitying each other, since marriage between them was an impossible thing until at least one of the two old men was dead; or they might have to groan till both were gone—not long, probably, though, as both Yerburg and Lowther were mostly long-lived, it might well be twenty years, thirty—an eternity. They were constantly talking of death—the death of two old fellows.

One evening they met—Fate meaning it to be their final lovers'-meeting—at Edge Down Tower, some three miles from Ghyll How; and that evening a pilot in his feet guided the Grandfather Yerburg, who had spurted abroad after Adam, to a coppice hardly forty yards from the fragment of rock they sat on. A falling water was mourning in their ears, so that the old man could hardly hear their talk; but his eyes could very well descry Hannah hanging on the arm of Adam, and a palsy took him from top to toe.

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As for them, their talk hovered about the old folks in the chronic manner; and “Ey,” said Adam, “I wish.”

And Hannah, with her head bent low, muttered woebegone: “Oh, we must not wish them to die.”

On which Adam slashed at a shrub, saying: “One of them would be enough; then, he well dead and gone, the other one might be getting over the old bitterness.”

She sighed, and there was silence.

“But why should *I*—why should *we*—suffer?” broke out Adam in a passion, with a ribbed and rigid jaw; then, mastering himself, he added in a lower tone “Ey, I wish to God.”

And now *her* face, too, that was pressed against his, got his hotness and intolerance, and her mouth pouted to mutter-: “Oh, well, and I wish, too; I cannot help it!”

"Isn't it a cross?" he cried; "you don't much care for that old dotard, I suppose, no more than I do——"

"I am—attached to him," she muttered; "but compared with being with you, what is his life to me? I would willingly part—yes, this night—with half-a-dozen such lives."

"Ey," muttered Adam, "I wish."

They stayed there long after darkness overshadowed the Edge, only parting when the sedge-warbler and wheatear were sweetening their last peewits of half-sleep in their nests: and never met so any more.

For before midnight both the old men were dead; both murdered...

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Grandfather Yerburg had been stabbed in the right breast, and had died ten paces from his own doorstep, "in Adam's arms" (as Adam afterwards swore), without his hat. Grandfather Lowther had been struck on the brow, apparently by a club or other blunt weapon, was so found lying on his face in his library, without his sword; and had died four hours afterwards in his bed, without having said anything.

Now, had any motive, however remotely, been imagined by anyone, facts were not lacking to show that Hannah's was the guilt as regards her grandfather, and Adam's as regards his, or that each was guilty as regards both the old people; but from beginning to end such a notion never penetrated any head, since such a thing as love betwixt a Lowther and a Yerburg was a circumstance well outside the bounds of guessing, and to the world it looked as if the two old worthies of Kirkdale could only have been murdered by gnome or Erlking.

Hannah alone knew that Adam had a motive; and Adam alone knew that Hannah had a motive: and to each of these the little pieces of evidence which levelled fingers at each others' guilt grew into proofs.

In the case of Hannah especially, nothing could shout louder for the old Lowther, after having been put to bed, had for half an hour recovered consciousness, and, when questioned by the apothecary, had answered by nods that he had no knowledge of having been knocked on the head, or of who had knocked him—at which evidence, given at the crowner's quest, Adam could imagine no motive for the old man's dumbness, save an eagerness to shield

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his grandchild and the name of Lowther from the disgrace of the outrage—though, as a matter of fact, that dumbness can at present be explained in another way; but in that day it was scarcely known that one, when stunned by a blow on the skull, is apt to be bereft of every remembrance of what has happened in one's life some time before the blow.

Nor was Adam's hand less evident to Hannah: for when at “the quest” Adam was asked if the old man, who had died “in Adam's arms,” had said anything before dying, Adam, after some hesitancy, confessed that he had; but, when asked what had been said, those fixed lips of Adam declined to answer; and Hannah asked herself: “Why, *why* does he decline?” Yet, in truth, this was no proof of wrong: for Adam, having let himself confess that the old man had spoken, could have invented some dying sigh. In reality, the words which the Yerburg had gurgled in breathing his last were these apparently purposeless ones: “*The Giant's Grave!*” and his grandson was shy and chary of chattering one word regarding the Giant's Grave, in which the Yerburg treasure lay buried.

Well, the “quest” ended, a week went by, in which the sweethearts, shy of each other's eye, held themselves from meeting—or writing: and to each this thing was an additional proof of the other's fault, the surest of all.

He lay in woe, re-uttering and re-uttering the same wild rote of groans—white hand washed with gore—not she! he got God to witness her guiltlessness—never, never.

But then—she was a Lowther. Cunning! Foxes

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all! And her words would come back to his brain in characters of flame, how only an hour or so before her grandfather's murder the girl had murmured: “I would part—yes, *this night*—with many such lives;” and now the conviction of her guilt would wring out of his soul strong groans of horror.

And she, too, would re-utter and re-utter the same rote of phrases, like a wheel reeling through her sickness, acquitting him with her lips' tip, saying, “He, the manliest... yes, with my heart I loved him!” but then, remembering his chronic “Ey, I wish,” her eyes would acquire a wildness of stare like a doll's stare, and in a state of semi-unconsciousness she would lie a night and day like a mummy, as dumb and numb.

Then, after three weeks, they met one evening by accident in the lonnin leading, at the back of Rindscarth, into the wood of the Two Yews, where

they had so many times met to sigh their fires, the rye-fields reaped by this time, streams running red and yellow with the year's dead leaves; and, touched by the after-flush of the sunset, the dale chastely blushed.

She, in her crapes, appeared aged by ten years, her hair draping a face raised from the dead, the only touch of colour in her black and blanched being the crimson of her lids' rims; and she halted three yards from him, not glancing at all at him, though she had caught one glimpse of his grey face ribbed, of the lugubrious gloom of his gaze bent on the ground without one look at her, of the disarray of his dress...

Anguish filled their long dumbness, until she muttered

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to him: "God save you, Adam... Oh, do not despair, my friend!"—putting out her hand backward to him.

He, for his part, tried twice to mumble something: "*Take heart—take heart!*" but no sound came out, as he clasped her offered hand, tortured it, fled onward on his way...

"Ey, but she did it for me," he sobbed into his hands, "for me merely, dear heart! No justice shall ever touch you, and if they send you to hell for it, to hell let me be sent to stay by you;" while from her, too, was wrung a cry, "Was it not done for me? And, if Heaven sentence me, I will ever love him. Only let me fly far..."

Each feeling it a duty to accuse the other, each fleered at such a duty. And on the same day, thinking to rid each other of the presence that must appear an accusation, they left the dale, Hannah and most of her domestics for London, Adam for Keswick.

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Five summers passed by: in the first of which Adam parted with his patrimony, and, with the proceeds, purchased the concern of a cocoa-merchant in Keswick, which presently commenced to spread considerably, and he to acquire high respect as a citizen: so that in the sixth year it was suggested to him to allow himself to be nominated to fill the dignity of town-reeve; and to this he agreed.

Now, during these years no communication had taken place between the sweethearts: Adam had no notion that Hannah knew anything of the way he went, nor she that he knew whether she was alive or dead; yet there were eyes that saw for each.

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Hence a hitch in the election of the Keswick town-reeve...

The electors—seven gentlemen who in the seven years preceding had occupied the office of reeve—were said to be for Yerburg as against another burgher nominated for the dignity, so that the election of Yerburg was felt to be certain throughout the borough: great, then, was the sensation when it turned out that not a single vote had been given for Yerburg.

The reason was this: that, on the day preceding the election, each of the seven electors had received a letter from a lawyer in Keswick, informing him that he, the lawyer, was under instructions from a client who desired to be unnamed—unless her name should be demanded—to state that Mr. Adam Yerburg was hardly a fit person to fill the dignity, his past having been darkened by a guilt. Hannah, in fact, agonised in heart, had regarded it as owing from her to the country to debar him from public office.

He, for his part, racked his cranium in vain to fathom the catastrophe—for a catastrophe it was, since his status in the town now waned, and his affairs felt the effect. A secret is not frequently well kept by seven; there grew up shrugs, and ogles, and grudging fellowship; and where there had been easy prosperity erewhile he now found it necessary to struggle. However, he struggled on; and four more summers passed.

At the end of those years Hannah was seated one evening in the drawing-room of the friends with whom she lived, having on her head a little cap,

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such as the Methodists of the day affected, for she had joined that sect; and seated near her was one Sir Lloyd Martin Phipps, a man of fifty, her hand in his, Hannah murmuring words to him, staring into vacancy, habited ever in her black, looking more like a woman of thirty-five than of twenty-seven; and her murmur was: “Ada, your wife and my cousin, was dear to me, and was my consolation in many a heavy day: for the sake of her four motherless ones, I won’t decline to be your wife. I think you can scarcely mistake my leit-motif, Martin, since you divine that I have loved, and still love. If, on that understanding——”

His knee bent to her. “On any understanding! I agree. Only grant that it be soon.” So in some days their engagement was known to the world: and Adam Yerburg heard of it.

With him, meantime, as was hinted, business had been seedy; and whereas he dated his embarrassments from the day when he had received

that setback at the reeve of Keswick's election, and whereas matters had advanced from bad to worse, he had now determined to retrieve his position by a desperate fresh bid for the reeveship: for now four out of the seven electors were new folks, who, he could not but think, bore him good will; and he had good hopes.

The date of the election came nigh; but five days before it the rumour of the approaching marriage of Hannah reached his ears, and after a sharp tussle of love and duty in his heart, he took coach for London to go and see and restrict her, not considering that he should permit her marriage with an

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honest man unconscious of her past. As for the office, he could be elected to that in his absence.

But when at last he came to London his heart failed him: he *could* not see her face... So, instead, he paid a visit to Sir Lloyd Martin Phipps's mansion in Chelsea...

He began by demanding and receiving from the baronet an undertaking of secrecy; then, with a face of pain, he gave his tale; and when the baronet, half fainting, demanded what proofs of such a charge he had to produce, Adam answered: "I produce no proofs; I open your eyes; henceforth the matter rests in your hands; and, if you marry her, as I beg God you may forgive this one blemish in a white life, so much the better."

Then he flew back to Keswick; but before ever his coach reached it, he received the news that he had been unanimously black-balled. For Hannah's hand had hewn anew. And within three weeks Adam stood a ruined man.

Of that ruin the news promptly reached Hannah's ears; and pretty promptly she despatched a command to her land-steward in Keswick to send anonymously to Adam bank-bills for £1000; but not so promptly that he ever got them: for she herself at the very same time was in the greatest perplexity and cark of mind, seeing that Sir Martin Phipps, almost at the last moment, had broken off the match and bolted, from which thing had broken out a scandal which smote not her only, but the family within which she lived.

Nothing she understood of it! Only, where blitheness and kindness had flowered about her life she

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now found coldness and aversion; and, finding the house no more a home, her mind was spurred to resolve upon returning to Kirkdale.

At about the same time Adam, for his part, seeing all round him the shipwreck of his existence, had come to the decision to leave the country, to seek fresh fields in America—a decision to which he came three days before Hannah's instructions as to sending him the £1000 had reached her Keswick agent; and immediately he made ready for a departure that was rather like a flight, he was so deep in debt, lacking even cash in hand to pay his passage. At the last, after a thousand doubts, he resolved to unbury that treasure, long buried, vowed by his grandfather to the routing of the Lowther, which lay waiting in the Giant's Grave.

Adam waited till it was late in the night—the night before his departure from the North country—then took tilbury to Inglethwaite, and thence on foot set off to Grenthet Edge, which for near ten years he had not seen, and now saw it drenched, strange-eyed, for all day it had been “donky” (wet) weather, and, though the drizzle had ceased for the present, trees still dripped everywhere, brooks ran brabbling about, the moon moving in and out among mounds of cloud.

On gaining the dale, he stopped to knock at the cot of a gossip, of old known to him, an old dale-fiddler, from whom he borrowed a spade; then began the tramp to Rindscarth—a strange agitation shivering in his knee; and some parts of the tramp he ran.

Within forty yards of the Hall's north side he passed, seeing, with a sense of surprise, several

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lighted lattices; whence the way was down the lonnin at the back, and across the beck, by the pheasantry, up the mounting ground, in amid the long-grass of the alder-forest, and onward to where the Giant's Grave stretched, all the dark seeming haunted to him that night, the night-winds haunted, that haughty heart of his admitted awe at the dripping of the trees, and the mystery of the meaning of their dripping: for great is Pan, Who with that gravity of His gaze smites to panic the highest heartlet of man; so it was not without hesitations, doubts, leers, that he pierced a way through underwood that no other foot had pierced for years; but, arrived at the edge of the Giant's Grave, with no delay he grips his spade to dig, his eyes by this time grown more used to the gloom.

Midway between the two standing-stones he stooped; but even as he stooped, his heart started: there where he was going to dig a hole already gaped.

A sense of fatality and haplessness fell then upon him, with the understanding that the hoard must somehow have been discovered by someone, and stolen: so, sick now in limbs and soul he let himself sink to the ground, to sit browsick in the grass, making of his hand a bed for his heavy head... After half an hour, however, he put forth his arm into the hole, as men in misery, with nothing else to do, will make sure of the already sure; and now, to his great amazement, his fingers, groping, found the things still there in the open hole—the whole of them—the cups, plate, paper-money, precisely as they had many times been described to him. On which, in his disbelief of his own fingers' feeling, he

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snatched flint-and-steel from his small-clothes, and struck a flash.

And by that flying light he perceived a sight, not with the eyes merely, but with the mind; and by that light's beam the nightmare and mistake of years rained like scales from his brain.

For, close by the hole's edge, he saw two objects that lay there forming a cross—one a stick, the other a sword; and he saw two other objects;: the bedraggled rags of two hats.

And the stick he instantly recognised—his grandfather's, its knob like a club; and the sword was the old Lowther's: he doubted it not, even ere a piece of tinder which he kindled showed the Lowther scutcheon within the hilt; nor were the hats less certainly Yerburg's and Lowther's...

He stood there irradiated, light rioting within his skull like coloured glories rolling within Geissler tubes; and now on a sudden his mouth stretched back like rubber in a tension of wretchedness, "oh, no," he said, and lay shaking his head on the ground with a wailing that gave out no sound, seeing her guiltless now.

For what had happened was no longer any mystery to him: he saw that his grandfather must have had some motive for coming to dig up the hoard—as a matter of fact, the grandfather had come to dig it up on the evening when he had seen Hannah in Adam's arms, with some notion of getting funds to smuggle Adam away out of the net of the entangler; and he must have dug the hole, and was going to lug off the whole, or some, of the

hoard, when the old Lowther, roaming through the wood, had found the foe
on

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Lowther ground over Lowther gold. That a row would now burst out was certain; Lowther's blade had buried itself in Yerburg's breast; Yerburg's club had struck Lowther about the brow; hats had flown off; and both, mortally mauled, letting fall their weapons, had then contrived to crawl homeward to die. It was so; and Adam's grandfather, by his dying gasp, "*The Giant's Grave!*," on Adam's breast, had made an effort to let Adam know that the hoard lay open.

After some time Adam began to get himself languidly up from lying there on his face, but in the very act sprang electrified, hearing, so to say, the secret breathed into his brain: "You have seen lights in the Hall to-night!" In the same moment he was running, blundering his way out of bush and bramble in a passion of impatience, then down the meadow, a succession of sounds resembling sobs breaking from his breast, and across the beck, up the lonnin, and into the Hall at the back—having every reason to believe her away, but feeling that Heaven would never be so severe.

After flitting hither and thither a little about the house he sighted light shining out of a dining-hall: and she, that same morning arrived from London, was in there, kneeling in front of a fire that babbled in a steel basket within the ingle, roasting oat-cakes over a grille...

Prying in, he saw her profile in the firelight, sorrowful now, the surges of her body burgeoned now out of the girlhood which he had hugged, but still the old ebon head, well-beloved, the chin and cheek's curve high-patrician, highly-achieved by the

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Earth-mother that had turned her out by three hundred million years of yearning and yeening; and suddenly her face turned, was aware—he was there with her.

There before the grate she remained some moments kneeling, agaze at that ghost of him, not breathing, while he, his hat down on his brows, stood brooding on her, unable to babble her name for the labour of his bosom; and the fire-tongues stuttered in the silence of their awe, and a big clock by the ingle clicked.

Then he mumbled her name, uncovered his head, and knelt, his brow bowed to the stick and rapier that he had dropped before him...

"This hour I've found out," sounded hoarsely from his throat: "see me here on my knees. Hannah; Hannah."

"Found out..." her lips breathed after him.

"Hannah, I have wronged you. Oh, it was a mountain in me—old, old—only this hour found out. Oh, Hannah, I have wronged you, and sinned the unpardonable sin. I should have seen that those old men killed each other _____"

"Old men..."

"This hour found out... I thought—somehow I thought—to who should I tell it but to you?—that it was you who—Hannah, this hour I've found out! See me humble here——"

Hannah, meantime, had by degrees got herself on her legs, and stood there giddy, pallor-struck, staring at him, dumb until she got out: "Our grandfathers?"

His head bent.

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"Killed each other?"

"This hour, Hannah——"

"Oh, but is this the God's truth?"

"The proofs are here; only this hour——"

Now she shrank, going "*Oh!*" as from a gash.

"I came to the Giant's Grave——" he began to say, but she, as when one sees a meteor, screamed "*Adam!*!" and was on him with sobbings that sobbed to him: "Forgive, forgive..."

In that little kirk of Kirkdale, built with square leadlights and timbers straight from the axe, they were married eight days later...

Hannah bore to Adam four sons and four daughters, and was willing, and a Leah, to him: but for which thing—or if those children had been conceived one day previously—this generation would be different, and history would have strayed from the rails of Fate.

This is the tale of Adam and Hannah.



On the telling of this tale, it was noticed that Joy alone did not join in the clapping, but sat in a state of staring toward the harbour, as if lost, lost, lost, in thought; otherwise an outburst of clapping followed upon the telling hardly less loud than upon the tales of Bates, of Fragson, of Hardacre, for Sir John Hay's deep eyes that dreamed were liked among the ladies, nor were the men cold, their clapping dominated, as usual, by those muscular palms

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of Tom Bates going strong; though in the midst of it, Fragson came out with the statement that it was not a tale, but a life-history: and this started a discussion which lasted until Pushkin, the telepathist, was led in blindfold; and while he bewildered every brain with his divinations tea was taken.

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But where was Joy? This became the point in the Castle drawing-room the next morning near eleven o'clock—a breezy morning, when a second sea-voyage, this time in Joy's steam-yacht, had been appointed to take place; and one could see from the windows that steam had been made, the vessel ready, when Lady Sartory started the alarm that Joy, who shortly before had been in the drawing-room, was not now to be found—scaring everyone! and in no time the men, girls, servants, were scurrying about the house and grounds, searching for the blind girl.

They could not find her!

It was after half an hour's ferreting that Maître de Gaud said to a group of the men, who had met on a terrace: "Where, by the way, is Bates?"

On which Fragson started, span glancing toward the four winds, but then said gladly, "*There's* Bates!"—nodding toward the main portal where Tom Bates was standing with his hands dived into his pockets, his eyes struggling to peer at the sun's glory without weeping.

"He has just come, then, for he certainly wasn't

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there——" de Gaud began to say, when Lord Archibald Stainsbury broke in upon him with the remark "*There's* Miss Richards"—pointing to where Joy suddenly stood at a corner of the Castle beneath the shade of a cedar which, its boughs all bound in chains, brushed the north castle-wall: whereupon the cry went out "*here she is!*," and everyone hastened to crowd round her, with questions: "What happened?" "Where were you?"

"I was—within the cedar," she replied in a tone of some surprise and protest.

"Then, the cedar's door must have got shut?—or you must have been noticed," Lady Sartory remarked.

"Doubtless the cedar's door shut," Joy answered... "I am awfully sorry if you have been alarmed, and kept waiting. Let us go now."

"Come, then, come"—from Lady Sartory.

And all, like a flock of sheep, were on the point of moving from Joy for the sea-voyage, when a cry of discovery broke from that unbridled dry tongue of Miss Clode: "She has been shut in that tree with Tom Bates! Look! There's blood on her—Oh, shame...!"

"My God, has he stabbed her?" demands Mons. Pascal.

"He gashed his neck in his agitation, shaving!" Miss Clode cried: "I saw blood on his collar. That's it! That's it! Think of anyone blind being so sly
_____"

"But yes, look! Her finger! Her finger!" now cried out Mdlle. Cazalés.

A ring was on it...

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Joy was standing with her back propped upon the wall, with abandoned arms, with pressed lips, trapped, but unrepentant, somewhat challenging, somewhat blanched and mottled, after the vomited madder of two convulsive flushes.

"Well!" went Aunt Anne, half ghast, half laughing.

And up Hardacre flung his arm. "*Hip!*—now altogether, you fellows—
Hip! Hip! Hurrah!"

Deep and high it noised, shouting about Joy's ears so loud, as to send her a shade paler. She shrugged and chuckled in her shoulder.

"Now up with the boysie Bates!" cries out Fragson; and they ran to the portal where Bates was speculating on the sun, got his long-legged weight into the air, sped down the terrace-steps with him, and while Joy was being made much of and spoiled with worship by her girls, they others twice circled the lake with Bates, giving tongue to a sing-song: "And so say all of us! and so say all of us...!"

Then all went down to the sea in the ship, and to the winds which were on the sea.

There were some sore hearts on that bark's poop that forenoon; but—pooh—they were not inconsolable: for still millions of breams teemed in

rivers and fruit in Bermuda. Not eight months later Pascal married. Gilbert married a charming lady, whom I now number among my friends. Hardacre married, and has cantered Tom's-and-Joy's little boys on his knee with a gee-up clucking, without ever a groan—"you bet." Fragson discovered another rich lady, told her some tale, and she married him, to his own

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benefit, and his country's, too, I think. I think I have heard that Lord Archibald Stainsbury is married. De Gaud after two years married. Only Sir John Hay to this day has remained unmated, his heart perhaps knowing its own smart.

THE END

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About the Author



Matthew Phipps Shiell (21 July 1865 – 17 February 1947), known as M. P. Shiell, was a British writer, remembered mainly for supernatural horror and scientific romances. His work was published as serials, novels, and as short stories. *The Purple Cloud* (1901, revised 1929) remains his most often reprinted novel.

Matthew Phipps Shiell was born on the island of Montserrat in the West Indies. His mother was Priscilla Ann Blake; his father was Matthew Dowdy Shiell, most likely the illegitimate child of an Irish Customs officer and a female slave. Shiell was educated at Harrison College, Barbados.

Shiell moved to England in 1885, eventually adopting Shiel as his pen name. After working as a teacher and translator, a series of his short stories began to be published in *The Strand Magazine* and other periodicals. His early literary reputation was based on two collections of short stories influenced by Poe published in the Keynote series by John Lane – Prince Zaleski (1895) and *Shapes in the Fire* (1896) – considered by some critics to be the most flamboyant works of the English decadent movement. His first novel was *The Rajah's Sapphire* (1896), based on a plot by William Thomas Stead, who probably hired Shiel to write the novel.

Shiel's popular reputation was made by another work for hire. This began as a serial contracted by Peter Keary (1865–1915), of C. Arthur Pearson Ltd, to capitalise on public interest in a crisis in China (which became known as the Scramble for Concessions).

The Empress of the Earth ran weekly in *Short Stories* from 5 February – 18 June 1898. The early chapters incorporated actual headline events as the crisis unfolded, and proved a success with the reading public. Pearson responded by ordering Shiel to double the length of the serial to 150,000 words, but Shiel cut it back by a third for the book version, which was rushed out that July as *The Yellow Danger*.

Some contemporary critics described this novel as a fictionalisation of Charles Henry Pearson's *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (1893). Shiel's Asian villain, Dr. Yen How, has been cited as a possible basis for Sax Rohmer's much better-known Dr. Fu Manchu. Dr. Yen How was probably based on the Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), who had first gained fame in England in 1896 when he was kidnapped and imprisoned at the Chinese embassy in London until public outrage pressured the British government to demand his release. Similar kidnapping incidents occurred in several of Shiel's subsequent novels. *The Yellow Danger* was Shiel's most successful book during his lifetime, going through numerous editions, particularly when the Boxer Rebellion of 1899–1901 seemed to confirm his fictional portrayal of Chinese hostility to the West. Shiel himself considered the novel hackwork, and seemed embarrassed by its success. It was a likely influence on H.G. Wells in *The War in the Air* (1908), Jack London in *The Unparalleled Invasion* (1910), and others.

His next novel was another serial contracted by Pearson to tie into the Spanish–American War. *Contraband of War* ran in Pearson's Weekly 7 May – 9 July 1898, again incorporating headline events into the serial as the war progressed. It was published as a book the following year.

The Purple Cloud was reprinted in the June 1949 issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*

Around 1899–1900, Shiel conceived a loosely linked trilogy of novels which were described by David G. Hartwell in his introduction to the Gregg Press edition of *The Purple Cloud* as possibly the first future history series in science fiction. Each was linked by similar introductory frame purporting to show that the novels were visions of progressively more distant (or alternative?) futures glimpsed by a clairvoyant in a trance. Notebook I of the series had been plotted at least by 1898, but would not see print until published as *The Last Miracle* (1906). Notebook II became *The Lord of the Sea* (1901), which was recognised by contemporary readers as a critique of private ownership of land based on the theories of Henry George.

Shiel's lasting literary reputation is largely based on Notebook III of the series which was serialised in *The Royal Magazine* in abridged form before book publication that autumn as *The Purple Cloud* (1901). *The Purple Cloud* is an important text of early British science fiction, a dystopian, post-apocalyptic novel that tells the tale of Adam Jeffson, who, returning alone from an expedition to the North Pole, discovers that a worldwide catastrophe has left him as the last man alive. Demonstrative of the speculative, philosophical impulse that pervades Shiel's work, *The Purple Cloud* engages with Victorian developments in the sciences of geology and biology, tending to home in on their dark sides of geological cataclysm and racial decline in keeping with what has been termed the fin-de-siècle 'apocalyptic imaginary', while ultimately putting forward a positive if unorthodox view of catastrophe.

Shiel had married a young Parisian-Spaniard, Carolina Garcia Gomez in 1898; she was the model for a character in *Cold Steel* (1900) and several short stories. (The Welsh author and mystic Arthur Machen and decadent poet Theodore Wratislaw were among the wedding guests.) They separated around 1903 and his daughter was taken to Spain after Lina's death around 1904. Shiel blamed the failure of the marriage on the interference of his mother-in-law, but money was at the heart of their problems. Shiel was caught between his desire to write high art and his need to produce more commercial fare. When his better efforts did not sell well, he was forced to seek more journalistic work, and began to collaborate with Louis Tracy on a series of romantic mystery novels, some published under Tracy's name,

others under the pseudonyms Gordon Holmes and Robert Fraser. The last of their known collaborations appeared in 1911.

In 1902, Shiel turned away from the more dramatic future war and science fiction themes which had dominated his early serial novels and began a series which have been described as his middle period romantic novels. The most interesting was the first, serialised as *In Love's Whirlpool* in Cassell's Saturday Journal, 14 May – 3 September 1902, and published in book form as *The Weird o'It* (1902). Shiel later described it as a "true Bible or Holy Book" for modern times, in which he had attempted to represent "Christianity in a radical way." This novel was far from hackwork, and besides apparent autobiographical elements (including a minor character based on Ernest Dowson with whom Shiel is rumoured to have roomed briefly in the 1890s), contains some of his finest writing, but it was not reprinted in England, nor formally published in America.

Shiel returned to contemporary themes in *The Yellow Wave* (1905), an historical novel about the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. The novel was a recasting of Romeo and Juliet into the ongoing war with leading families of the two nations standing in for the feuding Capulets and Montagues of Shakespeare's play. Shiel modelled his hero on Yoshio Markino (1874–1956), the Japanese artist and author who lived in London from 1897–1942. In February 1904, Shiel had offered to Peter Keary to go to the front as a war correspondent with letters of introduction from Markino. He may have met Markino through Arthur Ransome who dedicated *Bohemia in London* (1907) to Shiel and used him as the model for the chapter on "The Novelist."

Faced with declining sales of his books, Shiel tried to recapture the success of *The Yellow Danger* when China and Sun Yat-sen returned to the headlines during the Chinese Revolution of 1911–1912. Though a better novel in most respects, *The Dragon* (1913), serialised earlier that year as *To Arms!* and revised in 1929 as *The Yellow Peril*, failed to catch the public's interest. As the hero of the story had oddly predicted, Shiel turned away from novels for ten years.

It was once popularly believed that Shiel had spent time in prison for fraud; however, it was discovered in 2008 that in 1914 Shiel had actually been convicted under the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) for "indecently assaulting and carnally knowing" his 12-year-old de facto stepdaughter. Unrepentant, Shiel served sixteen months hard labour in prison, complaining to the Home Secretary about the law, though he assured his publisher Grant Richards in a letter that he had been treated well. Shiel's discussion of his crime is disingenuous; he conceals from Richards the identity of his victim in addition to misleading him about her age, and instead refers to "love-toyings" with an older girl on the cusp of maturity. Nor does Shiel mention that he had known both the girl and her mother's sisters long before his conviction, perhaps intimately, as contemporary letters from one of the sisters to Shiel suggest. Court records described Shiel as a "clerk and metal worker"; one of the witnesses was a metal worker and the records may have transposed some information. He appealed the conviction unsuccessfully.

The case was reported in *The Vote*, a weekly women's suffrage newspaper, on 4 December 1914 in its Protected Sex section. The article states that Shiel (misspelled as Sheil) denied the whole story and that the "case was remarkable for the philosophical discussions on sex" by Shiel who conducted his own defence. Shiel was described as having a "purient mind" by the presiding Judge, Mr Justice Coleridge. The article was rediscovered in 2019, 11 years after MacLeod's initial discovery.

It is too early to assess whether this new revelation about Shiel will have an impact upon his literary legacy. However, as Macleod argues in her essay, young heroines abound in Shiel's novels, where they are romanticised, idealised and sexualised through the eyes of the male author. She cites the example of the two-thousand-year-old Rachel in *This Above All* (1933), who is portrayed as part "child," part "harlot," part "saint", since she still inhabits the young girl's body she possessed when raised from the dead and thus rendered immortal by the Biblical Christ. Lazarus (also a 2,000-year-old immortal for the same reason) is warned ruefully against her: "If Rachel and you co-habit without some marriage-rite, you may see yourself in prison here in Europe, since it cannot be believed that she is as old as fourteen."

Over the next decade Shiel wrote five plays, dabbled in radical politics and translated at least one, though probably more, pamphlets for the Workers Socialist Federation. In 1919, he married his second wife, Esther Lydia Jewson (née Furley) (August 16, 1872 – February 16, 1942). Esther Lydia's first husband was William Arthur Jewson (July 12, 1856 - April 26, 1914), a prominent musician who had been born in London and died of a heart attack. Shiel and Esther travelled in Italy in the early 1920s, probably living largely off her income, and separated around 1929, but did not divorce. The separation was precipitated by Shiel's sexual interest in and possible abuse of Esther Lydia's young female relatives. Shiel then lived at Harold's Cross, close to Esther Lydia's house, 'The Kiln' at Wisborough Green, West Sussex.

He returned to writing around 1922 and between 1923 and 1937 published a further ten or so books, as well as thorough revisions of five of his earlier novels. Shiel spent most of his last decade working on a "truer" translation of the Gospel of Luke with extensive commentary. He finished it, but half of the final draft was lost after his death in Chichester.

In 1931, Shiel met a young poet and bibliophile, John Gawsworth, who befriended him and helped him obtain a Civil List pension. Gawsworth talked Shiel into allowing him to complete several old story fragments, sometimes roping literary friends like Oswell Blakeston into helping. The results were largely unsuccessful, but Gawsworth used them as filler in various anthologies with his name prominently listed as co-author. Redonda: the legend of the kingdom Main article: Kingdom of Redonda

As King Felipe, Shiel was purportedly the king of Redonda, a small uninhabited rocky island in the West Indies, situated a short distance northwest of the island of Montserrat, where Shiel was born.

The Redonda legend was probably created out of his imagination by Shiel himself and was first mentioned publicly in a 1929 booklet advertising the reissue of four of his novels by Victor Gollancz Ltd. According to the story Shiel told, he was crowned King of Redonda on his 15th birthday in 1880. However, there is little evidence that Shiel took these claims seriously. His

biographer, Harold Billings, speculates that the story may have been an intentional hoax foisted on the gullible press. At this late date, verifying or discrediting the story may be impossible.

On his death, John Gsworth became both his literary executor and his appointed heir to the "kingdom". Gsworth took the legend of Redonda to heart. He never lost an opportunity to further elaborate the tale and spread the story to the press. Gsworth supposedly kept the ashes of Shiel "in a biscuit tin on the mantelpiece, putting a pinch in the stew for special guests."

Excluding the collaborations with Tracy, Shiel published over 30 books, including 25 novels and various collections of short stories, essays and poems. Arkham House issued two posthumous collections, *Xelucha and Others* (1975) and *Prince Zaleski and Cummings King Monk* (1977). The Purple Cloud remains his best known and most reprinted novel. It has been variously described as both a neglected masterpiece and the best of all Last Man novels. It was credited as the loose inspiration for the film, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1959), starring Harry Belafonte, Inger Stevens, and Mel Ferrer. Stephen King cited it as an influence on his novel *The Stand*.

Some of the short stories continue to be reprinted, but many of his other novels, including the middle period romantics, have been nearly forgotten. As of January 1, 2018, all of the works published during Shiel's lifetime have entered the public domain in the United Kingdom and all other countries with a copyright term of Life of the Author plus 70 years.

